A SOCIAL WORKER'S ELABORATE SCAM

The battle over Newfoundland's $16-billion oil project

THE MIND-BENDING FUTURE OF AI

MACLEAN'S

CANADA'S MAGAZINE | MARCH 2023

"My generation values work-life balance over hustle culture. You call it lazy. We call it smart."

In Defence of Gen Z

BY STEPHANIE BAI

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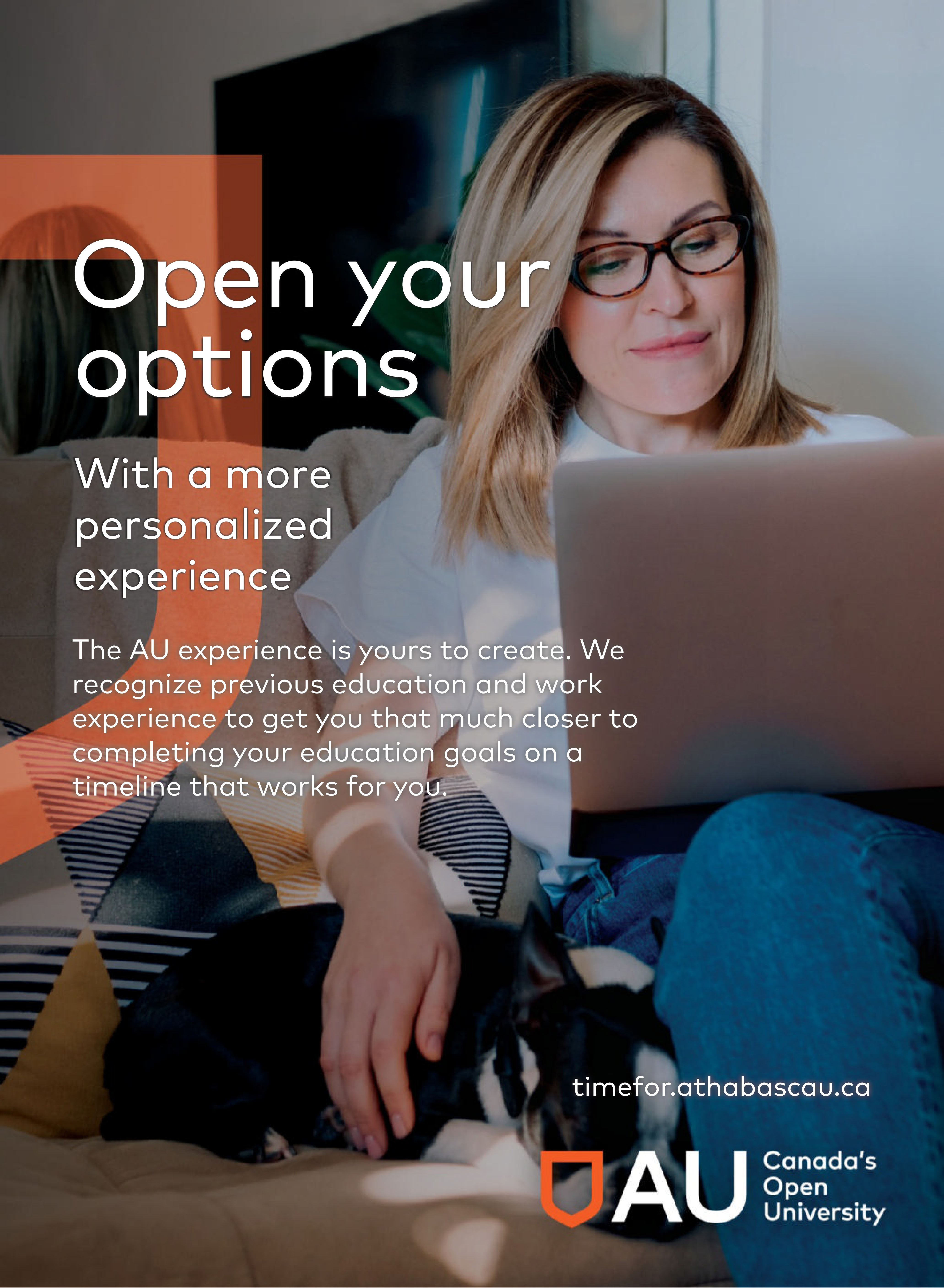

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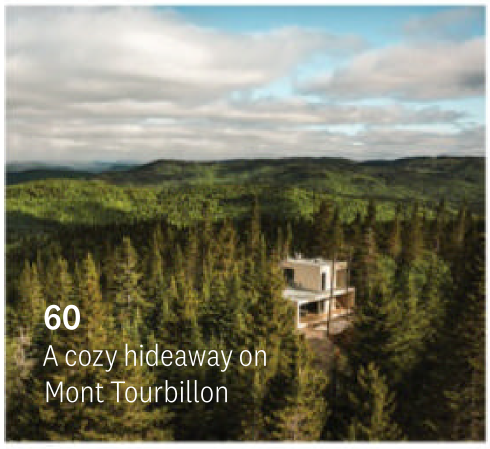

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EDITOR’S NOTE

IN THIS ISSUE OF MACLEAN’S

Canada is experiencing a troubling labour shortage. There are almost a million job openings right now across the country, the highest number on record. Boomers are exiting the workforce en masse, leaving behind vacancies in almost every sector. To address the problem, the federal government has committed to bring in 500,000 immigrants per year by 2025. Even with that influx of newcomers, the country will likely be dealing with a labour deficit for years to come.

So you’d think that this moment presents a golden opportunity for young people launching their careers. Canadians graduating from school this spring, with their university degrees or college diplomas or trade certifications, can enter the workforce with few obstacles and begin to climb the professional ladder. Yet members of the new generation aren’t leaping with joy-filled abandon at this prospect. They talk a lot about work-life balance, self-care and the philosophy of “quiet quitting”—performing one’s duties sufficiently but not beyond the job description.

What’s going on? Shouldn’t twentysomethings be pouncing on this historic moment to conquer their careers and, well, the world? Maybe they don’t want to turn into their parents, who they watched unhappily glued to their laptops around the clock. Maybe they don’t see the point of working all the time and sacrificing other aspects of their lives if they’ll never be able to buy property. Or maybe the very idea of a career seems futile on an overheating planet headed for self-destruction.

Boomers, Gen Xers and millennials struggle to understand why fresh-faced members of Generation Z (born roughly in the late 1990s and early 2000s) are rejecting the established customs of our hustle culture. Over the last six months or so I’ve read several pearl-clutching essays and op-eds trying to figure out what’s wrong with today’s youth.

> “Shouldn’t twentysomethings be pouncing on this historic moment to drive their careers forward?”

Perhaps we should be listening to the young people instead. Stephanie Bai just turned 23. Born in 2000, she has a lot to say about her cohort’s approach to work. Stephanie first proposed writing something about her generation in a conversation with me almost a year ago, just as she was graduating from the University of Toronto. That spring, she won the Best Emerging Writer prize at the National Magazine Awards. In September, she joined *Maclean’s* as the team’s youngest staff member and has proven to be a creative, hard-working editor. (Surely this isn’t what “quiet quitting” looks like!)

In her story “The Gen Z Revolt” (page 20), she makes the case that Canada’s labour shortage does present her generation with a unique opportunity—not to start the hustle early, but to reshape our society’s relationship to work. For the first time in years, the balance of power has shifted to the employee. If employers are desperate to hire twentysomethings, they might just have to give them what they want. In the end, I bet we’ll all benefit.

SARAH FULFORD
Editor-in-chief, *Maclean’s*

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Maclean's, 15 Benton Road, Toronto, Ontario, M6M 3G2
Maclean's ISSN 0024-9262. Publications Mail Agreement No. 42494512.
We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.
Printed in Canada by St. Joseph Communications, Print.

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SPECIAL ISSUE
YOUR GUIDE to THE PEOPLE, IDEAS and TRENDS THAT WILL SHAPE CANADA'S FUTURE
MACLEAN'S
2023
THE
YEAR AHEAD

EARLY 2022 CARRIED THE PROMISE OF A JOYFUL, BACK-TO-NORMAL-ISH post-COVID life. Then a tsunami of gloomy news dampened our optimism: inflation, climate disasters, the brutal Russian assault on Ukraine. The ugly political polarization south of the border crept northward—and a horde of trucks in downtown Ottawa led the charge. Some depressing trends are set to continue into 2023, but there are also many rays of hope. Canada is on the forefront of the fight against climate change, developing ingenious new gadgets and technology to reduce emissions. Drones and self-driving cars are going from sci-fi to mainstream. Hospitals will run on artificial intelligence, and Canadians will cope with exorbitant housing costs by devising clever living arrangements that come with the happy side effect of making us all feel a little less alone. Here, our guide to the Canada of tomorrow.

TOMORROWLAND

In our annual Year Ahead package (January 2023), we made more than 100 predictions about the people and ideas that will shape Canada over the next 12 months. Readers were particularly opinionated about lawyer Michael Geist's essay on the drawbacks of Bill C-11, a piece of legislation that, among other things, will mandate CanCon on streaming platforms like YouTube and Netflix.

Yes. Yes. Yes. The media has changed, and we have to change the rules. These algorithms are designed to make money, and if hatred makes money, they'll give you hate and outrage as content. We do not own these algorithms, and they could very well skew anything we hear and read in Canada to create hatred between each other. We absolutely have to control this with Bill C-11.

ChanceDevelopment813, Reddit

People need to be careful before believing anything that big American companies say about this legislation. They do not have your interests in mind. They don't want anything interfering with their revenue-generating algorithms tuned to hatred and conflict, because that is what sells. I'm not a big fan of this legislation, but anything that makes Google and Facebook turn to a media campaign means that they don't like it either. And if they don't like the legislation, there is probably something in it that benefits us.

Unlikely_Spinach8936, Reddit

The tech corporations we're talking about here have no foot to stand on. Google massively curates its searches and hides content that hurts advertisers. Your news feed is designed to keep you actively engaged, and it turns out the most effective way to do that is through outrage. Paid promotions push down any other kind of content.

Everything you "choose" online is filtered through dozens of algorithms to show what a corporation wants you to see. I know a lot of people will want to side with Google/Meta/Netflix as a reaction to this lousy bit of legislation. But these companies are doing exactly what you're standing against, only on a far larger scale.

NeoPossum, Reddit

Make a good product, people will watch. There have been plenty of TV shows and movies produced here that have been successful both in and outside of Canada. No need to force them on anyone.

CanadianDiver, Reddit

Dan Balaban, who runs the largest solar farm in Alberta, wrote about the province's coal-free future. It drew both cheers and eye rolls:

As a lifetime Albertan I was impressed and encouraged by Dan Balaban's prediction. Instead of whining and complaining about fossil fuels, he is describing what can be done to lessen our dependence on them. Bravo! My only concern is the farmland taken out of production to support the solar panels. We need precious arable land for crops and pastures.

Joyce A. Armstrong, Sherwood Park, Alberta

Every winter we get about 10 days of minus-35-degree weather when the wind doesn't blow and it's overcast. We'll always need fossil fuel–generated electricity.

Tim Vader, Facebook

Immigration expert Rupa Banerjee wrote about the forthcoming rush of new Canadians and why we need skilled workers.

The telling section is the one detailing the overwhelming number of temporary foreign workers. This has spread past the farming industry and is being used to suppress working conditions in other sectors of the economy. Employers advertise skilled positions at barely above minimum wage and then claim they "can't" find local workers. And we tolerate this manipulation of our economy.

Dale Harrison, Facebook

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THE INTERVIEW

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE NATION'S NEWSMAKERS

Martin Kon, a leader at the Toronto-based AI startup Cohere, wants you to give chatbots a chance

INTERVIEW BY **KATIE UNDERWOOD** • PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DANIEL EHRENWORTH**

THE ROBOTS ARE COMING. Well, technically, they're already here, but Martin Kon just arrived. Fresh off a stint as YouTube's chief financial officer—where he and his team launched the platform's TikTok-esque video Shorts—the Ontario-bred tech exec hopped back over the border and became president and COO of the mega-successful three-year-old AI startup Cohere, based in Toronto. Its mandate? Commercializing better human-computer conversations. Basically, they want a word.

Cohere's recent US$125-million funding boost, and Kon's pivot, coincides with the recent popularization of natural-language processing, or NLP, the branch of AI that's teaching computers to digest and produce speech and text with the sophistication of human beings. As everyday websurfers use NLP-based tools like ChatGPT to produce A-plus college essays, the founders of Cohere are hoping to revolutionize the way the world does business. I spoke with Kon about all things AI during his first week back in Toronto. He had just finished setting up his new work computer.

I'm excited to talk to you about the ins and outs of AI.
Sorry I'm late. I had to download Zoom and Rosetta and install certain things. I now have a Mac, which I'm not used to.

This is a funny way into the subject matter.
I was going to say: I think I just disqualified myself as a tech expert.

You're back in Silicon Valley North after a few years in Silicon Valley proper. How does it feel?
I found it really exciting to be in the middle of things. I think it's clear that the San Francisco Bay Area will remain the driver of pure tech innovation around the world, but what I realized in getting to know Cohere is that Toronto is a legitimate tech hub, too. It certainly wasn't 25 years ago when I moved away. I know of many Canadians like me who left the country. Now, we're returning.

How does industry culture there compare to what we've got going on in Toronto?
Well, times are a bit different now. Silicon Valley firms used to have massive events and product launches because they had all this venture-capital money pouring in. It was like they could do no wrong. You see less of that in 2023. Now, they're cutting staff and have a fifth of the money. I still tend to wear hoodies quite a bit, though.

Before Cohere, you were at YouTube, which will no doubt be booming for the foreseeable future. What inspired you to jump ship?
I mulled over that decision for six to eight months. In my last job, I reported to Ruth Porat and Susan Wojcicki, two of the most powerful women in the world—pretty amazing for a girl-dad. (I have two

> “Toronto is a legitimate tech hub. It certainly wasn’t 25 years ago when I moved away. I know of many Canadians like me who left the country. Now, we’re returning.”

daughters.) Similar to how YouTube has been a disruptor for video and music, Cohere and natural-language processing are disrupting how we communicate.

In what way?
You’ve probably seen all those unicorns flying through waterfalls—or whatever Dall-E 2 creates—but much of the data we generate is in the form of language. We’re figuring out how to apply NLP to real business problems. It’s an enormous opportunity, and it’s happening in the province where I grew up. Two of Cohere’s three co-founders were also once at Google.

In tech, all roads lead to Google, it seems. How will NLP show up in the lives of everyday Canadians?
The possibilities are endless. NLP is going to give computers the ability to understand text and spoken words in the same way that humans can. Marketing teams and retailers can use it to generate first drafts of blog posts or online product descriptions. It can synthesize huge amounts of information to help summarize news reports, legal documents, video calls and customer-support inquiries. It stands to benefit masses of professionals—news publishers, financial institutions, even tax authorities.

There have already been a few attempts to have robots co-write articles for news outlets like the *Guardian* and the *Globe and Mail*. What about *my* job, Martin?
I don’t think you have anything to worry about. Quality journalism is about a lot more than just writing a first draft of words.

Ideally, yes.
The goal is to reduce the lower-level aspects, so humans can focus on the high-level stuff, like structuring narratives and refining arguments. Google Sheets and Microsoft Word didn’t put writers or bankers out of work. It allowed them to do things they never could have dreamed of in the days of calculators or abacuses or, you know, quill pens.

God, I’d love to write with a quill pen.
You can do that for fun.

Okay, well, that was reassuring. What makes Canada a particularly fertile market for an AI boom? We’re often worried about a brain drain.
Toronto has taken a leadership role in some of the emerging machine-learning and AI technologies. A lot of them are coming through the University of Toronto and computer scientist Geoffrey Hinton, who is the go-to AI luminary. Some of the political developments in the U.S. and the U.K. within the last few years have also probably helped people see Canada as an attractive place to be.

That said, this country can get a little gun-shy when it comes to innovation. Take legislation like the proposed Bill C-27, which includes Canada’s Artificial Intelligence and Data Act—some think regulation might frighten founders.
AI is new territory. It certainly needs to have reasonable guardrails, but it’s important for Canadian lawmakers to reflect on the huge economic and societal value that the technology has for Canada. The danger is that, you know, I’ve become American myself. I could just jump over the border. Companies could easily swap their subsidiary to the parent and become an American company. That would be a real shame.

As we saw with crypto, technology often moves faster than governments can regulate it. What needs to be done so that the world of NLP doesn’t become the same kind of free-for-all?
Personally, I see NLP and crypto as completely different. There are some interesting applications for blockchain, but that explosion of hype—where anyone who launched a company and said “NFT” got millions of dollars? I always thought, *Why?*

Not so with NLP?
With NLP, the applications are clear. Yes, things move very, very quickly. Cohere’s co-founders helped put together a groundbreaking best-practices commitment with OpenAI and AI21 Labs, which are our competitors. They wanted to stand behind guidelines that had precautions around harm mitigation.

I’m guessing that, being in tech, you’re probably not super risk-averse.
I worked in consulting for 23 years. That’s the definition of risk-averse.

So the AI stuff is a pivot, then! When you think about what Cohere is on the verge of creating, does that combination of innovation and speed ever scare you?
Aiden Gomez, one of our founders, co-wrote the paper that introduced transformer technology—the “T” in ChatGPT—just five years ago. ChatGPT itself only launched last fall, and now everyone can play with it. That speed doesn’t scare me when you have the right people with the right values thinking about it—and, sometimes, losing sleep over it.

Are you describing Cohere’s co-founders?
They’re good people who want to do the

> “I don’t think technology will ever replace human interaction. It’s about how to make mundane tasks more efficient, so we can focus on higher-value ones.”

right thing, not because the government tells them to or because a certain move would be bad PR. I hope that governments seek out those kinds of people and say, “Can you help us to think about this gnarly, complicated, tough new thing?”

I’m sure Canadians will appreciate your emphasis on ethics given the existing stereotype of tech leaders—the obsessions with shiny new toys, the god complexes, et cetera.
Some are like that. But I wouldn’t want to work for a company whose CEO wasn’t a good human being, or someone who was just about shiny objects and maximizing profits. I think when you do the right thing for the world, most of the time, the profits follow.

Are there any aspects of your life that are surprisingly analog?
I’m not on Twitter. I haven’t seen that it enhances careers. My handwriting is appalling, but I take notes with a pen. (I almost never read them, but it’s proven that the act of writing helps with memory recollection.) My first job was at Bosch, which is the biggest car-parts manufacturer in the world. I like old cars, and I’ve always loved machines; it’s big tech in a different way. My Porsche 911 Turbo, which I had a poster of on my dorm-room wall, doesn’t even have power steering.

Were you ever an art guy in school?
I was interested in music. My wife’s a wonderful painter, though. My mother’s doing a lot of painting, too.

Siri and Alexa are household names at this point, but in the last few months, people have been furiously uploading their selfies to Lensa and generating wacky pictures with Dall-E 2. What do you make of it all? More importantly, Martin, what would your mom think?
Hopefully, she’d find it amusing and send me pictures of dogs in sushi houses or whatever we’re seeing online. But again, if we’re talking an NFT versus a Van Gogh, you can see the texture is different in a digital image—even if there’s only one in the world. I think there could be interesting applications for text-to-image technology in advertising and content creation, but I’m most excited about language. The pictures of cows flying over a snow-covered mountain in Greenland? That’s just fun.

AI used to live, more or less, in the domain of data. With advances in NLP, it’s moving into creative and relational tasks—things that are more distinctly human. I definitely want a robot in charge of getting me out of parking tickets; I’m a bit more reluctant to disclose my childhood trauma to one. What’s your stance?
That’s not easy to answer, by any means. I’m sure you have a banking relationship, right? I don’t know the last time I called my bank and thought: *Oh my goodness, how horrible! The teller’s been replaced by a robot!* I think: *I’ll use their fantastic app!* I can see my balance, I can get alerts. I don’t think twice about the fact that it’s not a human doing it for me. I just want the answer to my problem.

But the personal stuff—
Talking to a therapist about a child who’s misbehaving? That’s a situation where you’d want to talk with someone directly. I don’t think technology will ever replace human interaction. It’s about how to make mundane tasks more efficient so we can focus on higher-value ones.

So what do you think we’ll do with all that free time, without all that unnecessary drudgery?
Well, we now have more free time than we did 30, 40 or 50 years ago because we have dishwashers, remote controls and Uber—inventions that save us from having to do everything ourselves. Hopefully we’ll have more time to interact with each other and enjoy life. We’ll all just do what we do better.

What do you like to do with your free time?
My wife and I have an eight-year-old and a six-year-old, so I guess you could call that free time. A lot of it is spent with them, which is a joy. The kids both do Irish dance and gymnastics and play tennis. I also enjoy driving my Porsche on winding roads.

See! Not so risk-averse.
Not if you’re a safe driver. If you have a 911, you have to know what you’re doing. It’s called “the Widowmaker.”

If, at the end of 2023, you asked a Cohere-created chatbot to explain what your year involved, what would you want it to say?
That Canada is the home of the Stanley Cup champions for the first time since 1993. Also, that we continue to cement our position as a world leader in the realm of AI. We have a few months to see if that’s the reality.

That sounds more plausible than a Stanley Cup, honestly.
I’m not sure that we can engineer it, but that would be a nice thing. ■

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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Growing Older, Right At Home

Funding services in naturally occurring retirement communities, also known as NORCs, can help Canada's seniors thrive as they age in place **By Jen Recknagel**

MY GRANDMOTHER LIVED in the same house in Cleveland for 50 years. After my grandfather died, she spent 11 of those years alone. Eventually, she developed dementia and had her driver's licence taken away, which upset her. She soon went to live in Cape Cod with my aunt, who had offered to take care of her. Moving is hard enough, but imagine migrating to a different state in your 80s. Her health declined quickly after that. I knew there had to be a better way to support people at this stage of life.

Right now, if you're a senior living in Canada who can no longer live independently, there are two main paths. For those who require around-the-clock medical supervision, there are highly regulated, government-funded long-term care facilities. The other option is retirement homes, which are seniors-only private residences with set meal plans and regularly scheduled activities. But what about seniors who'd prefer to live out their days in the comfort of their own homes? At the University Health Network in Toronto, where I work, we're exploring another avenue: bringing support directly into areas where high numbers of seniors already live. There's even a name for these places: naturally occurring retirement communities, or NORCs.

NORCs might be regular residential apartments, condos, co-ops or even entire neighbourhoods—geographic areas that weren't *specifically* designed with older adults in mind, but which have a lot of them regardless. Many seniors who have

ILLUSTRATION BY **PETE RYAN**

decided to age in place might not require the intensive support of long-term care. Perhaps they cannot afford retirement homes. What my team at UHN proposes is to bring programming to them, right where they live. This could involve connecting them to health services, organizing community dinner parties or even using space in a condo building's rec room to set up a wellness hub. NORC programs are tailored to what residents need (and want).

The NORC movement isn't new. Programs started popping up in buildings around New York City as early as the 1980s. By 1994, New York State had passed legislation to subsidize 10 NORC programs; today, it funds 41, which serve thousands of clients. The concept has been much slower to catch on in Canadian cities, which offer no funding for NORC programs. But currently, in Ontario alone, there are more older adults living in NORCs than in long-term care and retirement homes combined. Almost 2,000 buildings across the province qualify as NORCs. Together, they house more than 200,000 seniors.

While studying NORCs, my team came across a program called Oasis Senior Supportive Living in Kingston, Ontario. Back in 2009, a forward-looking community leader named Christine McMillan—then president of the Frontenac Kingston Council on Aging—got together with residents of the city's Bowling Green II apartment complex to discuss how to improve their living conditions. They were tired of feeling disconnected from their community, spending days in their houseclothes, and eating tea and toast for dinner because they were too tired to cook.

With the help of McMillan and her team, the seniors paid a local community college to bring in three-course meals three times a week. Later, they convinced their landlord to let them convert an unused space in the building's basement into a seniors' lounge. People living at Oasis were less likely to experience emergency department visits, hospital admissions and falls. Now, Oasis operates similar programs in NORCs in London and Hamilton, Ontario, through a mix of donations and grants. There's no reason why this kind of customized programming couldn't be adopted (and funded) by the Canadian health care system at large.

More than ever, Canadians are keen to explore alternative models of senior care. By 2051, one in four of us will be 65 or older. Institutionalizing a quarter of the population isn't feasible or affordable—for the government, for taxpayers or for families. The pandemic only further strained our already understaffed and overcrowded long-term care facilities. And then there are the demographic shifts: recent data from Statistics Canada shows that more adults over 65 are moving to urban areas than ever before, choosing to live in high-rises instead of detached homes.

"Many seniors want to continue to live among young people and families—not just play golf or be entertained to death"

The NORC model addresses some of the most common issues with senior care, the first being financial. The average cost of a hospital bed is $842 per day, while care at home costs the government $42 a day, on average. Spots at retirement homes, on the other hand, can run up to $6,000 a month. If programming comes directly into NORCs, many seniors could delay going into long-term care—or possibly even avoid it altogether. They could continue to pay their own utilities and rent, and the government wouldn't need to build as many new facilities. Most importantly, all the NORC services—from the flu clinics to the group exercise classes—could be offered at no cost to residents.

Another good thing about the NORC model is that it allows older adults to maintain their autonomy. We've heard from front-desk staff in senior-heavy buildings who say they regularly get calls like, "I can still cook, but can you open this jar for me?" These are small tasks, but ones that usually fall to adult children or neighbours. A well-funded NORC might employ on-site staff to help out with the little things, particularly for adults whose mobility is challenged but not altogether gone. In buildings where higher levels of support are needed, we're looking into connecting residents with experts who can address issues like hearing loss, fall risks or even mental health.

Most importantly, NORC programming is driven by seniors themselves. In many cultures, elders are seen as wisdom keepers, but in North America, we ignore them. It's almost like, "You're obsolete now." The NORC model recognizes that seniors have great ideas worth listening to—that they are the experts when it comes to understanding their own quality of life.

NORCs aren't communes, where people are always in your business. Residents can opt in and out of programming. That said, there's an even greater need for connection as spouses and friends pass away; NORC programs can offer that. We hear from many seniors that they want to continue to live among young people and families—not just play golf or be entertained to death in seniors-only communities. Because NORCs are regular residential areas, they are inherently intergenerational. We've seen younger seniors—those who might have recently retired—pitching in to help those who are less mobile. NORC programs can also be customized to suit a building's age breakdown and evolve over time. What people need between 65 and 75 is very different from what they need (and want) in their 80s.

As it stands, there is no public funding for NORC programming, but we've been championing the model at all levels of government. It's been encouraging to see that, more and more, everyday Canadians are hearing about NORCs. Seniors have told us how programs have transformed their cold high-rises into real communities, and about how their neighbours stop them in the hallway to excitedly grill them about upcoming events. As you age, your world doesn't have to get smaller. In fact, a lot of fun could be happening right downstairs. ■

JEN RECKNAGEL *is the director of innovation and design at the University Health Network's NORC Innovation Centre in Toronto.*

Tundra Ties

Labrador's striking new cultural centre is a place for local Inuit to gather and celebrate their history

THE TOWN OF NAIN, on the rugged, mountainous Labrador coast, gives new meaning to the word "remote": it's inaccessible by road and overlooks the wild Labrador Sea, which freezes for six months of the year. It's also a gateway to the jaw-dropping Torngat Mountains National Park and an important cultural centre for Labrador's Inuit community, who make up the vast majority of the area's population. (Nain was founded in the late 1700s by Moravian missionaries.) Until recently, the community had nowhere to showcase artifacts from its rich history. That's why, in 2009, the self-governing Nunatsiavut government commissioned Newfoundland-born, Norway-based architect Todd Saunders to design the $19-million Illusuak Cultural Centre.

Saunders is known for creating contemporary geometric structures that draw from the striking landscapes that surround them. He's also the architect behind Newfoundland's Fogo Island Inn, a celeb-magnet destination hotel meant to evoke the stilted fishing structures built by outport settlers 400 years ago.

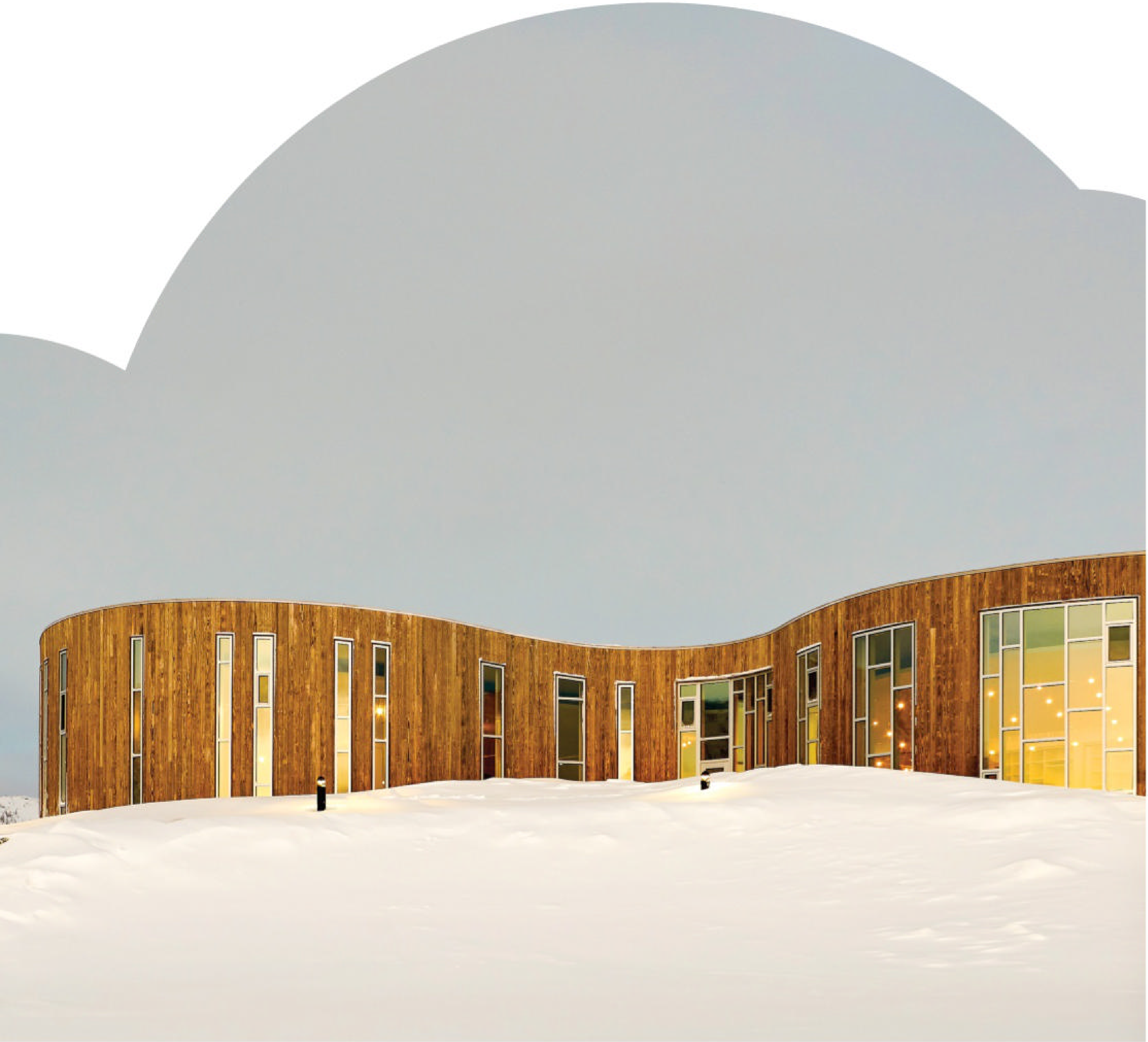
For the Nain project, Saunders took inspiration from nearby Rose Island, specifically its sod houses—rounded, sunken temporary shelters the Inuit would build in the summer months. The result: a curved, flowing structure that features a café, a craft shop, studio space and a 75-seat theatre, as well as offices for the Nunatsiavut government and Parks Canada. The building opened in the fall of 2019 and now serves as a gathering spot for the community to celebrate its roots. So far, it has hosted grade school visits, presentations, meetings, cultural performances and weddings.

Illusuak was built on solid permafrost in one of the country's harshest, most isolated environments. Its building materials had to be floated in by barge. The steel-and-timber-frame structure is wrapped in ceiling-height windows and hand-cut Kebony spruce cladding, which will weather to grey with time, blending into Nain's landscape. Inside, there's timber panelling, stone floors and locally sourced sealskin floor coverings. Among the treasures housed in Illusuak's exhibit space are Inuit-made soapstone pots and lamps and whalebone and ivory tools, some of which were returned home from the Smithsonian.

—Jacob Rutka

FISHY BUSINESS The centre's gift shop and café, awash in spruce, sells locally crafted items—like beaded earrings and sealskin barrettes—and regional delicacies, like fish and brewis, a cod- and biscuit-based dish

Photographs courtesy of Saunders Architecture



SHEER EXCITEMENT Illusuak's exhibition area has floors of blue eyes granite and a view of the nearby mountains. The windows were constructed in pieces to contend with the area's wild winds.

RIDE THE WAVE The building's undulating shape wraps around the entire exterior. To find out where Saunders got his inspiration, look no further than its name: "Illusuak" means "sod house" in Inuktitut.

The Gen Z Revolt

Young Canadians like me are fighting for saner, happier, healthier 9-to-5 lives. What we achieve could transform work for everyone.

By Stephanie Bai

“Tell me about yourself.”

Whenever I hear those four words, my brain flatlines. I scramble for an answer and wonder if there’s anything interesting to say at all. Without exception, my response is the same: every time I’m asked to describe my life, I describe my job.

Work has always anchored my identity. It was the engine that propelled my family from China to Canada in 1998, two years before I was born, and tales of my father’s heroic work ethic and self-sacrifice have played for years like a movie montage in my mind. There he is, waiting at a bus stop in suburban Toronto, starting his 90-minute commute to an IT job downtown. There he is, hunched in a chair at the Chapters bookstore near our home, poring over volumes about computer coding. There he is in our living room, where I’m lying on the couch as he paces with a book in hand, mumbling new English words to himself. “Dexterity,” he says. “Dexterity, dexterity, dexterity.”

His life advice has always been simple: “Don’t be stupid. Work hard.” That maxim catapulted him to a successful IT career, in Canada and in the American financial services industry. I’ve always tried to follow his example—and in trying, I had my first anxiety attack in middle school. The night before a Grade 7 history test, I sat hyperventilating on my bedroom floor, my looseleaf notes on the Roman Empire fanned around me. My hands trembled and my heart flopped in my throat as I tried to steady myself. I was certain that the consequences of success or failure would reverberate far into my future. If I did well, I could be enrolled in honours classes in high school. That could mean a higher GPA, boosting my chances of getting into a great university. Then I’d have better job prospects—provided I completed enough internships, participated in extracurricular activities and networked. But first I needed to know the difference between Augustus Caesar and Marcus Aurelius, who was not Mark Antony, who was related to Julius Caesar, but not to Marc Jacobs. Looking to my One Direction poster for strength,

Photograph by **Ebti Nabag**

I gulped down a few big breaths, dug my nails into my palm and kept studying late into the night.

My university years, from 2018 to 2022, were illuminated by the glow of my desk lamp. I'd work for days on end, throwing myself into classes, clubs and writing for the university newspaper, where I was also a managing online editor. I would spend days barely sleeping, hopped up on caffeine and adrenaline. My roommate got used to seeing me emerge from my room at odd hours in a long white robe, hair swept into a bun, laptop in hand. I would lie down on her bed and tell her I was on my sixth cup of black tea, or that after I finished a newspaper assignment at 10 p.m., I had another to write until 3 a.m., then an in-person class at 8 a.m. Once the buzz wore off, the feeling of hollow exhaustion crept back in. I'd lie under the covers, unable to move. I knew there was more to do, but it was impossible to muster the energy to put my brain and body back into action. Sometimes I would cry for hours; sometimes I felt too immobilized to cry at all.

Work was the centre of my life, and everything else too often slipped into a distant orbit: friends, family, a love life, hobbies, health. What work consumed above all else was time.

Then came the pandemic. My world shrunk to an 11-by-10-foot apartment, and the newspaper work slowed. During that downtime, I went on walks with my roommate, thought about graduation and what would come next. But I was nagged by the idea that even as the world was shut down, I should be working harder and longer, being more productive.

Work was the centre of my life, and everything else too often slipped into a distant orbit: friends, family, a love life, hobbies, health

I'm a member of Generation Z, the cohort of young adults born between 1997 and 2012. I came into the world in the year of Y2K and *Bush v. Gore*, and I was a toddler when the twin towers fell and the iPod launched. As a teenager, I watched the world (and my dad) worship tech giants like Steve Jobs, who bragged about their 80-hour workweeks. I witnessed the gig economy replace nine-to-five work, and saw millennials fall sway to startup culture's 24/7 grind.

It's no wonder I nearly burned out before high school. But if you've heard anything about Gen Z, it's probably the opposite: we're rejecting traditional workplace norms and refusing to work 12-hour days or glue ourselves to our mobile phones all weekend in case the boss emails. Instead we're prioritizing mental health, time off and work-life balance. We want clear boundaries, better working conditions and higher pay. In return, we've been derided as coddled, lazy and unwilling—or unable—to work hard.

Jonathan Haidt is a 59-year-old social psychologist and co-author of *The Coddling of the American Mind*, a book decrying young people's supposed obsession with victimhood. Last December, he told the *Wall Street Journal* that Gen Z's bad attitude to work constitutes a "national crisis" that could "undermine American capitalism." (His thoughts were shared on Twitter by right-wing culture warrior Jordan Peterson, age 60.) Everywhere I turn, I see similar critiques of my generation—that we're entitled snowflakes more concerned with self-care than rebuilding the post-pandemic economy. My dad would probably agree. Though he's not nearly as alarmist as Haidt, he's always been worried that my generation is too soft, too ready to surrender to hardship.

We aren't the first generation to earn this kind of ire. Thirty years ago, Generation X were branded "slackers." Fifteen years ago, millennials entered the workforce amid talk of balance and work-life flexibility. In the end, that flexibility turned into an always-on hustle.

In 2022, I graduated university. The pandemic's mandatory slowdown already had me thinking about my relationship to work. Even in my university circles, I'd heard friends exhorting one another to be more mindful with their time, to check in on burnout. I began noticing how those ideas were playing out among my generation. Last fall, when I took my first full-time job after graduating from university, as an associate editor at *Maclean's*, I wanted to wrap my head around what was happening. Were we really any different from generations before us?

I spoke to dozens of people, including other Gen Z workers, economists, HR experts and business owners. What I found is that the Gen Z revolt isn't just media froth—it's real, widespread and formidable. And more than in previous eras, conditions today are uniquely ripe for lasting change.

Employees hold power today in a way they haven't in decades. COVID-19 sped up the retirement of Canada's baby boomers. Unemployment, including youth unemployment, is at near-historic lows. Job vacancies throughout 2022 sat at long-time highs (they've fallen somewhat since, though still sit well above normal). The labour market is in dire need of more workers, and job seekers have leverage to extract real concessions. At the same time, new technology is enabling unparalleled flexibility as to how and where work gets done. And for people of all ages, the pandemic instigated a major reconsideration of what they want out of their jobs and lives.

Batool Khozema, 25

Civil engineer, EIT, Toronto

“I’m an elder Gen Z, and I think that means someone who grew up on social media, who isn’t afraid to speak against injustice (even if they may not always be fully educated about political issues), who depends on technology and who’s fed up with the live-to-work mentality that millennials have adopted.

Most of all, I relate to that last point. At the job I took after university, the mentality was that time off is for the weak. Work came first and life second, and I quickly became unhappy. Today I work for a company that’s much younger and more diverse, where people aren’t afraid to challenge long-standing processes if they think they can be improved.

Switching jobs has taught me what I want out of my career: mentorship, a work-life balance and an opportunity to change and improve the status quo.”

The Gen Z revolt is here, but it doesn’t look like Haidt’s panicky description of a generation that’s lost its way. If we can seize this moment in time, we have the power to change the world of work for the better—for ourselves and for everyone else.

Like me, Batool Khozema is no stranger to hard work. When she was eight years old, her family moved from Pakistan to Markham, Ontario, where her father worked as a security guard. He’d been an electrical engineer in Pakistan, but his credentials weren’t valid in Canada. After about a year, he returned to Pakistan and found better work. Khozema and her two older sisters stayed with their mother, who worked night shifts at a manufacturing company. She clocked out just in time to take the kids to school.

Khozema always knew she wanted to make her parents’ sacrifices worth something. She graduated as high school valedictorian and studied civil engineering at the University of Ottawa. In August of 2021, she was hired by a construction company as a quality inspector on job sites. As a young woman in an industry still rife with old-school, tough-guy thinking, she’d frequently hear older men complain about her generation’s insistence on

Photograph by **Kristina Dittmar**

setting boundaries between work and the rest of their lives. It soon became obvious that she was expected to prove herself—and she did. In February of 2022, a co-worker left on paternity leave, and her managers asked her to take on his duties at no extra pay, framing it as a trial run for a promotion.

She'd arrive at 6:45 every morning and spend the day travelling between job sites. She'd often skip lunch and stay later than most of her co-workers, finally arriving home around 6:30, often to collapse on her apartment floor. "I didn't want to wake up the next morning," she says, "because I'd have to do all of it again."

She began experiencing stress-related pain in her lower back. When she moved, even to relax her shoulders, she was sore. The bags under her eyes sagged, her acne flared and she was plagued by sleeplessness. One Sunday morning in March, it all caught up to her. Exhausted and wrung out, she couldn't stop heaving and sobbing on her bedroom floor long enough to stand up. She spoke to a friend on the phone, and said, "I can't do this anymore." She hadn't let herself say it out loud before. Her friend told her to quit. "I can't do that either," she said. Quitting was antithetical to everything she had worked for her entire life. It felt like failure. But after talking to an older colleague who coached her on the perils of burnout, she gave her HR team a list of demands—among them, a different role and a change of job location to be closer to family. If those demands weren't met within six months, she'd be out.

Khozema was moved to a project in Kingston, somewhat closer to family in the Toronto area, for five weeks, but talk of promotions came with a multi-year timeline. She asked herself what she wanted: better hours, better location, more growth opportunity. After starting therapy and taking time off, it was obvious that wasn't going to happen. So in September she started a job hunt, and three weeks later had a new position lined up, with better hours and stronger prospects for advancement. "I was in a battle, and I won," she says. "And it feels great."

That battle is spreading. Online, young users are racking up hundreds of millions of views on TikTok and other platforms, posting skits and advice with hashtags like #IDontDreamofLabour, #WorkYourWage and #QuietQuitting—refusing to go above and beyond one's job description without compensation.

Offline, the fight is taking the form of individual actions like Khozema's, as well as more organized efforts. In 2021, Gen Z employees organized a successful unionization drive at a Starbucks in Buffalo, New York. That kickstarted a wave of unionizations at more than 250 U.S. locations. During last year's Labour Day parade in Toronto, Unifor national president Lana Payne told media that Gen Z was revitalizing the labour movement.

When they can't improve their jobs, many young people are simply leaving them. Statistics Canada uses a metric called "job tenure" to track the average amount of

Brendan Simone, 23

Elementary school teacher, Edmonton

"I'll be looking for my first teaching job this fall, and the two main things I want are permanence and opportunities for extra work.

I care about work-life balance, but a lot of teachers have side hustles now because life is getting more expensive, and technology lets teachers achieve that kind of balance while making money creatively. For example, I know people who make and sell worksheets and lesson plans online. Today we can build on so many resources that already exist, like templates and guidelines. It's good to know I can take advantage of those opportunities, but still have evenings to myself. I'm getting married soon, and we're saving for a down payment, so that's important.

That's also why I'm targeting school boards that offer summer teaching or tutoring. Those could help me improve my craft, and the money won't hurt."

Photograph by **Paul Swanson**

Tanya Sharma, 25

Environmental, social and governance specialist, Toronto

"In 2019, I landed a position at a big consulting practice that specialized in human capital—managing employees, basically. It exposed me to a lot of diverse industries and had me working with Fortune 500 companies, but after a year I wasn't connecting with it. I took a break to think about what I wanted out of work. That led me to a small tech start-up that collaborates with investors, asset managers and foundations to help them understand the environmental and social implications of investments.

Every day I learn about climate-change mitigation and clean tech. It's creative and inspiring, and I feel a sense of belonging. We get Fridays off as mental-health breaks, which has allowed me to focus on my work as a musician, under the name Static River.

Earlier in my career, I looked for stability and big names. Now I appreciate work-life balance and a sense of purpose."

time Canadian workers stay in their jobs. It ticked down between 2020 and 2022, from an average of 106 months to 101—a modest four per cent decline. But for workers under 25, the drop has been steeper, from 19.5 months to 17—a 12 per cent decline, the biggest since the late '80s, and a strong indication that young people are walking from jobs that don't offer what they want.

At the same time, a related phenomenon known as "the Great Rethink" is forcing employees and employers to reconsider their relationship to work, and to one another. The power to redefine those relationships is increasingly in employees' hands.

Cassidy Mercier, now 25, was working as a project coordinator when she says her workload quadrupled. Even after a raise, she discovered she was making less than the starting salary of a new co-worker with the same position. She quit for a new job as a project manager at a marketing agency. But four months into that job, a senior colleague quit, and Mercier took on most of their workload as well as her own without a clear idea of when somebody new would be hired to help. Essentially working two jobs for a modest $53,000 salary, she requested a meeting with the company's owner to present what she felt was reasonable

Photograph by **Kristina Dittmar**

compensation: a $5,000 raise. The response was deflating. She was told she needed to prove she deserved it, and her performance over the coming months might help show that. Mercier had seen the toll over-the-top workloads had taken on her older family members: deteriorating mental health, general unhappiness. She quit this new job too—the conversation with her boss made it clear that she simply wasn't valued. Today she works remotely in Ottawa for the Winnipeg-based Brandish Agency, where she has flex time and unlimited vacation and sick days.

As I reached out to more and more young workers, similar stories piled up. Elias Saab is a 21-year-old civil engineering student in Ottawa whose revelation about the value of his own time came early, at age 17. He was making minimum wage at a major pharmacy chain, working the Friday overnight shift from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m., sometimes staying until 6 a.m. It was the first time he realized the money doesn't always match the labour. He didn't think he was above hard work, but he found the constant 12-hour red-eye shifts to be borderline exploitative. Like Mercier and Khozema, he quit.

In Stouffville, Ontario, I found Sakina Hussain, a 23-year-old clinical researcher who logs off from her job as soon as the clock strikes 5 p.m. She had always been militant about working hard in school, especially after seeing her immigrant parents sacrifice so much to give her financial support and stability. But in September of 2021, while she was still in university, her grandfather died from COVID-19, and so did her grandmother shortly after from unrelated causes. The sudden experience of death spurred the kind of epiphany typically reserved for mid-life crises. She vowed to spend her time with intention—which didn't mean long, uncompensated hours in front of a computer.

My cohort's refusal to give our all to work may stem from a recognition that our lives, and our futures, don't look like those of past generations. The classic milestones of adulthood—home ownership, financial stability, a comfortable retirement—all seem wildly out of reach. I don't anticipate I'll be able to afford a home in Toronto, or in any Canadian city, any time soon. When my dad lived in Toronto 24 years ago, his salary was $15,000 less than mine. But renting an apartment in the building he lived in would be way beyond my budget today.

What we want from work is intimately tied to what we want for our lives. If the financial rewards of our work won't open the same doors for us, if we don't have the opportunities that generations before us had, why should we work the way they did?

As workers become more protective of their time, companies are racing to adapt and get ahead of competitors when attracting and hanging on to young talent. At Toronto-based Fresh Squeezed Ideas, a boutique research and strategy consultancy company, founder and CEO Karen McCauley knew her workplace had to change. The company, which currently has 20 employees, lost a third of its team in early 2021. Most of the

Jacob Halloran, 25

Physiotherapist, Halifax

"When I finished physiotherapy school in Ontario, I wanted to return to my home province of Nova Scotia. I worried I'd struggle to find a job, but I applied to four clinics in Halifax and they all answered with "When can you start?"

I chose the clinic that offered the best opportunity for mentorship. The experience made me realize that health care in Canada is desperate for new hires. It's a big problem for the country, but it grants negotiating power to new employees.

I found it so challenging to define my own worth in a fast-moving job market. On one hand, we hear we're heading into a recession and we should jump at any job. On the other, the labour shortage warrants higher pay. I felt a bit greedy asking for $80,000 right out of school, but I need it to pay my student loans, buy groceries and cover rent and a car payment."

Photograph by **Riley Smith**

departures were from the younger portion of the workforce, older Gen Zs and millennials. “The feedback we were getting from people was that they just couldn’t handle the stress of the work anymore,” McCauley says. “It was sobering.”

She had to re-evaluate how her workplace, well, worked. Makail Johannesson, a 27-year-old employee, pitched an idea long on the fringes of workplace development: the four-day week. He gave a PowerPoint presentation explaining to McCauley just how long the idea had been bouncing around. In 1933, the U.S. Senate passed a bill that would have limited the workweek to 30 hours, but it was vetoed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the 1950s, vice-president Richard Nixon declared that a four-day workweek and a “fuller family life” were on the horizon. Of course, they weren’t.

Johannesson was passionate, but McCauley remained skeptical. “It didn’t make sense to me that you could take away a day of work, and people could still be as productive,” she says. But she dove into the research, which showed that other workplaces participating in similar overhauls didn’t see any hits to productivity. In 2022, Fresh Squeezed Ideas became one of 10 Canadian companies openly participating in a six-month pilot program led by 4-Day Work Week Global, a non-profit that helps companies with the shift.

“The philosophy is that it’s 100 per cent pay, 80 per cent time and 100 per cent productivity,” McCauley says. Workers take Fridays off without any change in salary, though they still have to check email twice a day in case of urgent client needs. Clients have been almost universally receptive to the change, and all prospective ones are briefed about the shorter workweek.

What Gen Z want from work is intimately tied to what we want for our lives. If we don’t have the opportunities that generations before us had, why should we work the way they did?

In the latest results released by 4-Day Work Week Global, all the companies that joined the pilot program continued their new schedule after the six months ended. When compared with the same period in the previous year, revenue for participating companies rose an average of 38 per cent. Ninety-seven per cent of employees said they wanted to continue the shorter weeks.

The response from McCauley’s team was overwhelming. The additional personal day had a direct, positive impact on the quality of work employees produced. Staff were re-energized by the new schedule and kept hitting deadlines just as they did before. The younger members of her team were especially enthusiastic in their support.

At Uber Canada, head of public policy and communications Laura Miller has found that her Gen Z employees have shifted her own relationship to work. Miller—on the younger side of Gen X at age 44—admires the way young workers practise work-life separation, setting strict boundaries for their personal time without sacrificing job performance (and jumping back online when needed). Miller was used to working through weekends, glued to her array of devices, waiting for the next ping or beep. Now, if she works weekends, she’s better at blocking out a contained chunk of time and not letting work bleed into her other priorities. While Miller was scrolling on Twitter recently, she stumbled on a viral post, written in January by a New York–based startup founder, that read: “Work-life balance in your 20s is an easy way to guarantee a mediocre career.” She couldn’t disagree more. When she thinks about the people she’s seen excel the most, she remembers the quality of their work and their effective, efficient use of time.

Not every employer is as receptive, of course. As Gen Z pushes, some are pushing back. The costs of what we want don’t always go over well in the C-suite.

When Gen Xer Elon Musk took over Twitter last October, he quickly ended the company’s remote-work policies. He demanded that employees—even those living in different cities and states—come to the office at least 40 hours a week and commit, in his words, to an “extremely hard-core” work culture. Last fall, RBC chief executive and baby boomer Dave McKay mandated that the company’s 89,000 employees had to return to the office for at least two days a week beginning in September. He said that technology couldn’t recreate the in-person “energy, spontaneity, big ideas or true sense of belonging.” And in January of this year, Disney CEO Bob Iger, another boomer, told employees they would have to return in person for at least four days a week, starting this March.

Gen Z’s demands are also tangible and expensive, even if they do result in greater productivity and less turnover. Those funds will have to come from somewhere. Tom Collver is co-founder of PB+J, an e-commerce creative agency that also participated in the four-day workweek pilot program. Gen Z candidates flock to his company, making up roughly 50 per cent of all applicants. PB+J has always had mental-health benefits in place, and they’ve swapped out certain benefits for others, depending on employee usage and feedback. Collver acknowledges that it all costs money, but maintains that the investment in the workforce is well worth it. When his company goes into discussions about the next fiscal year, he says that benefits are never on the chopping block. “We haven’t faced any tough decisions to provide one over the other, because we believe that benefits need to be part of the equation,” he says. When the company relinquished office spaces during the pandemic, the leadership team looked into reinvesting that money in their benefits budget.

Of course, if 2023 brings with it a recession, and unemployment rises, some of the power currently in employees' hands may shift back to employers. Widespread layoffs in the tech sector early this year have already sparked concern that the tide may be turning. On the other hand, Gen Z is not alone in wanting a different relationship to work. Seventy-six per cent of Canadian workers aged 54 to 72 want a flexible schedule, for example, according to a study by marketing consultancy Harris Insights & Analytics. And pressure can still be applied from the bottom up. After hundreds of Twitter employees chose to quit rather than participate in Musk's newly hard-core office culture, the company's stance softened—Musk instead declared that employees should have in-person meetings with their managers regularly.

Musk's backtracking speaks to the strength Gen Z may be able to wield as its numbers grow. In 2021, in the midst of the most acute phase of the pandemic, I began actively trying to figure out how to disconnect my sense of self from my productivity. There wasn't a notable moment when I looked around and said, "Hey, maybe I've got it all wrong!" It took time—and my friends made it happen. They texted me to ask how much sleep I'd gotten during finals season. They reminded me to drink water and get fresh air, they dissected burnout over FaceTime calls and meandered with me across the city during long walks. Together, we worked to forge a new path forward.

As Gen Z pushes, some employers are pushing back. Flexible work arrangements, generous benefits and work-life balance don't always go over well in the C-suite.

My parents always told me that everything they sacrificed, they sacrificed for their kids. I feel guilty that, after all my dad has done for our family, my own pursuit of balance between work and life might mean losing my drive—the trait that tethers us. He taught me to work hard because he wanted to teach me to survive. When we lived in Illinois for eight years, my parents were always concerned about whether they'd be able to stay in the country if they lost their jobs. They shielded me from this fear, but they walked on shifting ground. All they could do was work their hardest to give me stability, without the luxury of considering the balance in their own lives. It was an act of love and selflessness. They've seen the world in all its bitter forms, lived for years with lumps in their throats because they didn't know if they could make it in North America. When I talked to my dad about it years later, he said he would never forget the precarity. He knew he could lose everything he had.

Today I'm trying to pry myself loose from the fear he felt. When I start to feel like I'm falling behind, I think about a story Khozema told me. Last summer, a few months before she quit her job, she was planning to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. The trip had been in the works for around two years; she was inspired by a friend who had reached the summit in 2020. She had it all planned out. Khozema, who is an experienced mountain climber and hiker, spent the summer training. She would fly to Tanzania in mid-August and stay with her friend in Moshi, the gateway city to Mount Kilimanjaro. Five days later, she would summit Africa's tallest mountain alone.

Then, in the first week of August, she got sick—a sore throat, a fever, a cough. Her rapid tests came back negative for COVID-19, and she took some cold meds to recover. By the time she arrived in Moshi, she felt mostly recovered but anxious.

Three days later, Khozema started her first day of hiking. It was cold and windy as she trekked eight kilometres with a guide through dense forest, where tree roots curled on the ground and monkeys ambled between green vines thickly draped from branches. "Just stay strong," she kept telling herself. "You'll survive this—you've done a lot worse." After a cold and restless night at camp, she continued her climb. The terrain flattened, and white tufts of clouds hovered over the rocks. Eleven kilometres later, she felt healthy and energetic, ready to summit the next day.

On the third day, she woke with a fever. She walked out of her hut and vomited on the ground. Her head was spinning and she couldn't finish breakfast. Her blood oxygen had dropped from a healthy level, above 95 per cent, to the low 80s. At that point, a person can begin to hallucinate, and organ damage becomes a possibility. "This is bad," her guide told her. "Your body's not absorbing oxygen as much as it should be."

Khozema hiked up a little further, to a lookout point. Her breath was short, and she stopped to vomit beside the trail, but she wanted to know that she'd tried. Half a kilometre later, she looked past the rocks and shrubbery to the arc of the summit she knew she wouldn't reach, and she was proud.

Even though everyone at home was waiting for a picture of her at the peak, ruddy-faced and grinning, she knew she risked permanent injury if she ascended to where the air was too thin, the pressures on her body too high. So she turned around and began her descent. "Tough times should not break you," she says. She knew she would come back to the mountain one day. ■

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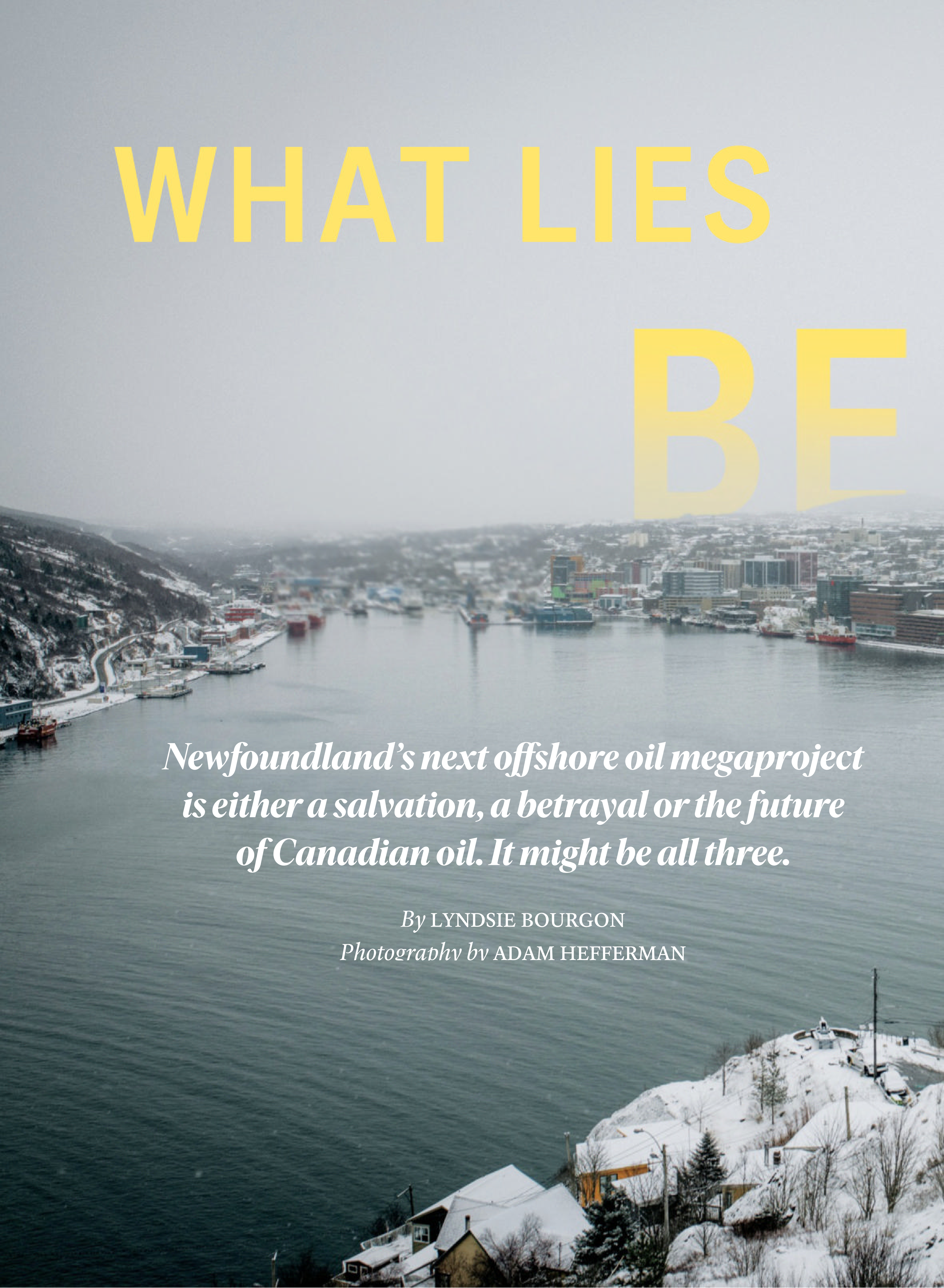


WHAT LIES BE

Newfoundland's next offshore oil megaproject is either a salvation, a betrayal or the future of Canadian oil. It might be all three.

By LYNDSIE BOURGON

Photography by ADAM HEFFERMAN

NEATH

A journey from downtown St. John's to the Flemish Pass will take a traveller nearly 500 kilometres into the North Atlantic—one-sixth of the way to the shores of Ireland. Along the way they'll pass through ruthless storms, towering waves and the paths of massive icebergs drifting from the Arctic Circle. Plunge below the surface, however, and there's a bounty to be found.

The Pass is a deep basin carved into the ocean floor, under which lies at least 500 million barrels of recoverable oil, first discovered in 2013 by the Norwegian oil and gas firm Equinor. Today, the company plans to open this inhospitable seascape to the most ambitious offshore-oil undertaking in Canadian history.

In the expedition-heavy language of the oil industry, Equinor has dubbed the Flemish Pass a "new frontier" in deepwater oil, farther to sea than any prior offshore project in Canada. Workers will live and work here on a platform floating above open-ocean waves, above a production area spanning nearly 5,000 square kilometres. They'll extract oil from wells more than a kilometre below the water's surface. The $16-billion project, to be called Bay du Nord, will be majority-owned by Equinor, with BP holding a smaller stake. It comes loaded with superlatives: deepest, farthest and, as Equinor is keen to claim, cleanest. The company estimates that extracting a barrel's worth of oil from Bay du Nord will produce eight kilograms of carbon dioxide. That's far less than the bitumen produced in Alberta's oilsands, some of which comes with a per-barrel footprint of more than 100 kilograms, thanks to the energy-intensive extraction and refining it requires.

Bay du Nord's reservoirs of light crude are also part of a development tradition older than Canada itself, one the country was built on: step far into nature, fell this timber, fish these waters, extract this oil and there will be prosperity. There are few places in Canada where that economic dependence on the natural world is still as starkly pronounced as in Newfoundland. Largely rural, surrounded on all sides by the sea, this is a place where many of the mainstays of 21st-century economies have been slow to take root. The only real flash of wealth in Newfoundland's modern history was the brief, oil-fuelled boom of the late 2000s. That's why, in a world increasingly moving toward decarbonization, Newfoundland is beating an opposite path. In 2018, the province pledged to double oil production within a decade. Two years later, after a rally in support of the oil industry in St. John's, Premier Andrew Furey bluntly told reporters, "There is no future here without it."

For Bay du Nord's opponents, including environmental activists and Indigenous communities who've spent years fighting the project, the future is exactly the point. Ian Miron is a lawyer with the environmental group Ecojustice, which has lobbied against Bay du Nord. "Our federal government says

WAITING FOR THE SHIPS TO COME IN
St. John's Harbour is the primary hub for Newfoundland's offshore oil industry

that it understands climate science," he says. "So it should understand that Canada can't be a climate leader and approve fossil-fuel infrastructure projects like this one."

That's to say nothing of the more localized hazards. In lockstep with Equinor's language of frontiers and discovery is a language of danger: of unpredictable conditions at sea, chemical waste, spills, leaks and blowouts. The history of Newfoundland's offshore is littered with accidents, tragedies and disasters. As recently as 2018, Husky Energy's SeaRose project spilled 250,000 litres of oil into the Atlantic—the largest such incident in the province's history.

For most Newfoundlanders, however, the environmental risks and threats to life and limb pale in comparison to other risks: of poverty, crumbling infrastructure, outmigration. To them, Bay du Nord represents a promise—that this is a place where the good life is still possible.

It was the good life that drew Amanda Young offshore. Young, who's 40, grew up in Corner Brook, in western Newfoundland, where her father was a fisher and lobsterman. During her childhood, in the 1980s, Newfoundland had yet to produce a drop of commercially viable oil. Instead, companies from Canada and abroad, including Mobil, Chevron, Husky and Petro-Canada, were jockeying to drill exploration wells, especially in the basins of the eastern Grand Banks, the vast chain of underwater plateaus known for centuries as one of the planet's richest fishing grounds.

The province's economy was stable but sluggish, with unemployment rates that hovered above 15 per cent, around double the numbers nationwide. The province's economic identity was still rooted in the fishery that had sustained it for centuries—until 1992, when Young was nine. That year, the federal government imposed a moratorium on the province's cod fishery, to preserve fish stocks that had become dangerously depleted thanks to a variety of factors: bigger and faster fishing vessels, new technologies that allowed more fish to be caught at once, and an influx of international fishing off the Grand Banks.

The moratorium created a sharp dividing line in Newfoundland's modern history. It put more than 30,000 people out of work, ended a way of life rooted in five centuries of history and rendered centuries-old communities economically obsolete.

In the next decade, the province experienced a net loss of nearly 60,000 people to other provinces—more than 10 per cent of the total population, which was then fewer than 600,000 people. Young's father was nearly one of them. He even bought a plane ticket to Alberta, before getting hired at the last minute onto a boat fishing for herring and mackerel.

But even as the province wrestled with the economic disaster unfolding on land, something else was happening offshore. In 1997, the first commercial oil trickled in from the Hibernia fields on the Grand Banks, where Chevron had discovered promising deposits in the '70s. The trickle soon became a torrent. In 2002, the province produced, for the first time, more than 100 million barrels in a single year. As global crude prices soared from barely $20 a barrel in 1998 to more than $120 in 2008, oil royalties helped wean the province off the equalization payments—federal transfers intended to reduce fiscal disparities between provinces—that had sustained it for years. In 2008, unemployment reached a 30-year low. For the first time since the '70s, the province was growing, welcoming newcomers and its own expats, many returning home from Alberta's oil fields.

St. John's Harbour was busier than ever with drill ships and supply boats. High-end restaurants filled vacant storefronts downtown. The median house price in the province shot from under $100,000 in 2000 to nearly $300,000 a decade later, sparking big-city-style bidding wars.

Around this time, Young returned from culinary school in Prince Edward Island. She spent the next few years working at a restaurant in St. John's, making $14 an hour and sharing an apartment with four roommates. In her off-hours, she started researching nursing school—Newfoundland's population, the oldest in Canada, made elder care a likely growth industry. But talk of oil soon drowned that out. One day at work, a colleague mentioned the money to be made offshore. Young investigated the qualifications she'd need: first aid, safety courses, helicopter safety training for journeys to and from rigs.

She knew working offshore had its risks. In 2009, she witnessed a co-worker's grief after a family member was one of 18 people killed when a helicopter, en route to a production platform on the Grand Banks, malfunctioned and plunged into the ocean. Still, in 2012 she walked into the offices of the catering company that contracted to oil companies and said she was a chef, ready to work. She was offshore two days later.

Young worked on the Terra Nova and SeaRose platforms on three-week rotations. She cooked and baked, and the relationships she formed with colleagues were nearly familial. She spent more time with them than with many family and friends, day in and day out.

And she was flabbergasted by the money. "It changed my life, drastically," she says. She got her own apartment, paid off her student loans and then bought her own house in St. John's, without a partner or family help. "The offshore provided me a great sense of independence."

In a province that's faced chronic underdevelopment, where the trappings and comforts of modern consumer life have been harder to come by than almost anywhere else in Canada, oil has changed lives. Robert Greenwood is director of the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development at Memorial University, which researches economic and social policy in Newfoundland. "Based on what people want, oil has been an unmitigated benefit for Newfoundlanders," he says.

Greenwood can speak to that from personal experience. In the 1970s and '80s—years before the offshore was producing commercial oil, when oil companies were still drilling exploratory wells—he worked on rigs to support his mother after his parents divorced. In 1982, Greenwood was on the Ocean Ranger, a platform on the Grand Banks owned by Texas-based Mobil Oil. That February, he was sent to Texas for training. On the way to the St. John's airport, his taxi driver said something about a rig in trouble. When the plane landed in Houston, another passenger, also an oil worker, called home on a payphone. He hung up, called Greenwood over and broke the news: caught in a cyclone, the rig had been battered by 110-foot waves and 100-knot winds. All 84 crew members died in the sinking or after their lifeboats capsized in the frigid North Atlantic. In the heat and humidity of the Texan airport, the news of their deaths felt almost unreal. After his training, Greenwood went to New Orleans and drank for three days. Then he went home, and soon was offshore again.

"You do what you've got to do," he says. "I went back to the platforms because I needed the money. Oil has been an inextricable part of my life."

In 2014, an oversupply of oil on world markets sent prices plummeting. Canada's energy sector was in crisis, and investment in both Alberta's oilsands and Newfoundland's offshore slowed dramatically. The following year, Newfoundland's population hit a 21st-century peak of 528,000—then began to drift downward again. Again, the spectre of outmigration hovered like a dark cloud over the province.

Conor Curtis was born in 1992, the year the cod moratorium was implemented. He grew up in Corner Brook, Newfoundland's second-largest city, with a population of 20,000 people, and saw the moratorium's impact throughout his childhood. Today, as head of communications with Sierra Club Canada, he's an adamant opponent of Bay du Nord on environmental grounds—but he understands why that feeling isn't commonly shared in his home province. "The trauma of something like the moratorium, it continues on in communities, across generations," he says. "It's a feeling that things could fall out from under your feet at any moment."

The oil boom rescued many from that feeling, only to plunge them back into it when it came crashing down. But even today, in its diminished state, the industry remains a behemoth. In 2021, it accounted for nearly one-third of Newfoundland's GDP, more than four times as much as real estate and health care, the next largest industries. It employs 3,000 people directly and 20,000 indirectly. And it is, in Greenwood's words, "the crack cocaine" of government revenue.

In 2012, when Amanda Young first ventured offshore, oil royalties accounted for nearly 40 per cent of the province's $8.6-billion revenues. By last year, in which the province posted a $400-million deficit, oil accounted for a still-considerable 10 per cent. To cut oil out of the provincial budget, says Greenwood, is a non-starter: "It's like, what part of the children's hospital would you like to close?"

Then came Bay du Nord. In 2018, the province announced plans to develop the reserves that Equinor and its then-partner, Husky Oil, first found in 2013. Expectations were big: the provincial government estimated the project would create more than $14 billion in economic activity, ensure 22 million work hours and provide $3.5 billion in government revenues. That, in turn, would set Newfoundland apart as what the provincial government calls a "deepwater centre of excellence," thanks to the sophisticated engineering and technical requirements of the project.

> ***Bay du Nord is part of a tradition older than Canada itself, one the country was built on: step far into nature, fell this timber, fish these waters, extract this oil and there will be prosperity***

Equinor has a long history with dangerous, difficult offshore conditions. It was formed in 2007 from the merger of Norway's state-owned Statoil and the oil and gas division of energy company Norsk Hydro. Statoil helped open Norway to exploration in the '70s, where severe and unpredictable weather posed many of the same challenges found in the Flemish Pass.

Should Bay du Nord go forward, some of its roughly 40 wells will be drilled to 1,170 metres below the waves—almost 10 times the depth of the province's second-deepest project, the SeaRose, which sits at a comparatively shallow 120 metres over the Grand Banks, west of Bay du Nord. Drilling into the seabed will require workers to connect steel pipes, each about 30 feet long and weighing 600 pounds, into a column known as a "drill string," descending all the way to the ocean floor. At the bottom, a boring device will cut into the seabed, pushing deeper as the string grows. On the ocean floor will be a "blowout preventer," a series of clamps that closes the pipe to prevent explosions of oil that can occur when pressure builds too high.

A blowout is only one of the environmental hazards at play with a project as large and remote as Bay du Nord—there are also risks of leaks, disturbances to underwater ecosystems and collisions between supply ships and marine life. In 2019, Equinor submitted its environmental impact study to the federal government, outlining those potential risks and mishaps, along with its plans to prevent them and deal with spills or other problems should they occur. Two years passed as analysts with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada parsed Equinor's submission, returning to the company to ask for new information and amendments. In July of 2020, Equinor submitted a revised, 434-page report. It concluded neatly: routine operations will be unlikely to result in adverse environmental impacts. The federal government's decision—to approve or not—was expected that same year.

The province and trade unions lobbied government hard for approval, waging a PR campaign to win over Ottawa. For them, Newfoundland's very future hinged on a green light. There was risk in a long delay—that investors could get cold feet and think Canada's regulatory atmosphere inhospitable, leaving the development unviable even if it was approved.

In September of 2020, with the Impact Assessment Agency still deliberating, Bay du Nord proponents organized a rally in support of the oil industry on the steps of St. John's Confederation Building. Dave Mercer, then-president of Unifor chapter 2121, gave a speech to the hundreds-strong crowd about his time working on the Hibernia rig. Mercer is a material controller, who assists in loading and unloading materials on production platforms. He spoke not only about Bay du Nord, but about the oil bust and pandemic stresses that had cost thousands of jobs in Newfoundland since 2015. He listed offshore projects that had experienced layoffs: Hibernia, Terra Nova, SeaRose, Hebron. In the preceding five years, more than 6,000 oil-industry employees lost their jobs. "The financial burden is overwhelming for so many," he said. "House payments, car payments, childcare, after-school activities, college, university, are now on hold."

Amanda Young spoke next. "We're asking our government for a hand up, to work with us, listen to us," she said. "Sit down with the companies and negotiate a deal. Most importantly, figure out a solution that keeps the people of Newfoundland and Labrador working in this province."

Privately, Young had grown pessimistic. She had been laid off from Terra Nova and didn't know when or if she would be going back to work. She had opened her nursing school application again, and thought she might have to sell her house and start again in a new career—then with a partner and two stepchildren—right as she was about to turn 40. It was a terrifying prospect.

MIDDLE GROUND Memorial University professor Robert Greenwood favours a managed transition from fossil fuels, investing offshore revenues into a green economy

As the federal government deliberated, the context around the project, and Canada's oil and gas future, kept shifting. In the fall of 2020, oil prices began rallying from the steep drop at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, improving the economic outlook for the industry. At the same time, talk of more rapid transitions away from fossil fuels entered the mainstream. In May 2021, the International Energy Agency—the Paris-based advisory organization that produces forecasts and reports relied on by the global energy industry—issued a special report stating that developing new oil and gas deposits was incompatible with keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius, as advocated by the Paris Agreement, to which Canada is a signatory. "If governments are serious about the climate crisis, there can be no new investments in oil, gas and coal, from now, from this year," IEA executive director Fatih Birol told media.

The report sparked new debate about the future of Canada's oil and gas assets. "It's always been bizarre logic to me, the idea that because Newfoundland is so dependent on oil and gas, it should take the longest to transition," says Conor Curtis. It's exactly those economies and communities most dependent, he says, that should be moving faster than everyone else to change.

Meanwhile, the federal government's decision kept getting pushed—first to December of 2021, and then again to March of 2022. Final approval for Bay du Nord lay, ultimately, with Environment and Climate Change Minister Steven Guilbeault, once nicknamed the "Green Jesus of Montreal" for his uncompromising environmental activism. In 1993, in his early 20s, he co-founded environment and agriculture non-profit Équiterre. He later joined Greenpeace, heading its climate change division. In 2001, he climbed 340 metres up steel maintenance cables hanging from the CN Tower to hang a banner reading "Canada and Bush climate killers." His appointment in 2021 as environment minister was poorly received by many in the energy sector—as well as by politicians who had appointed themselves the industry's defenders. "His own personal background and track record on these issues suggest somebody who is more of an absolutist than a pragmatist," said Jason Kenney, then premier of Alberta. "I hope I'm wrong about that."

As it turns out, he was. When Guilbeault took office, his official biography dubbed him "a pragmatist who works to make a difference by building bridges"—quite a pivot from his days as an environmental radical. Still, given his history, opponents of Bay du Nord hoped he would make a stand and reject the project, regardless of the Impact Assessment Agency's recommendation. Guilbeault has the power to exercise what is known as ministerial discretion, to overturn any recommendation if he desires, even if it contravenes broader consensus.

That hope was bolstered in January of 2022, two months before the decision was due, when the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat—a group of federal scientists who provide advice and peer review to Fisheries and Oceans Canada, or DFO—released its own independent review of Equinor's

BOON TIME Amanda Young is a cook on the Terra Nova offshore platform. For her, Bay du Nord represents a future for an industry that's given her economic independence.

environmental submission to the federal government. Its takeaways were damning.

The report outlined what it characterized as omissions and mischaracterizations in Equinor's submission. It said the company had downplayed the potential for ship strikes with marine animals. It said the possibility of an "extremely large spill" was 16 per cent over the project's lifetime, despite Equinor's impact statement referring to it as "extremely unlikely." It oversimplified the effects of a blowout, failing to heed the lessons of the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010 that killed 11 workers and spilled 134 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. Spawning grounds for capelin, an important Newfoundland fish species, would be threatened, which would have knock-on effects on endangered species including American plaice and killer whales, which feed on them. A blowout could lead to slicks of oil spreading across sensitive areas of coral and sponges and damage shrimp and cod habitats.

The review ultimately concluded that Equinor's submission wasn't a credible source of information. Though the report for the DFO was responding to Equinor's 2019 environmental impact statement, not the revised 2020 version, Curtis and other critics say Equinor's revisions still didn't come close to addressing the concerns outlined.

Montreal-based environmental lawyer Shelley Kath—who did consulting work with Steven Guilbeault in his Équiterre days—was commissioned last year by an environmental organization called stand.earth to analyze the report's findings. She concluded that Equinor's revised impact statement, used as the basis for the federal approval, failed to address many of the DFO scientists' critiques. It continued to underestimate the potential for ship strikes with marine mammals (like whales), mischaracterized the effects of oil spills on marine life and, perhaps most significantly, downplayed the potential for a major oil spill. Equinor's final revised impact statement continued to

RIPPLE EFFECT Scott Penney is CEO of the Port of Argentia. "As a Newfoundlander," he says, "when you talk about the impact of these industries, and changing the generational outlook, you get almost blurry-eyed."

refer to a large spill as "extremely unlikely," despite that 16 per cent likelihood.

"That just on its face gives one a queasy feeling," says Kath. "A sense of the proponent not taking the criticisms seriously." Kath points out that a spill in the Flemish Pass, in the inner branch of the Labrador Current, could rapidly spread oil southward through waters rich with marine life.

In March of 2022, more than 200 environmental groups across Canada and worldwide jointly called on Guilbeault to reject the project. That same month, Sierra Club Canada held a media briefing on Bay du Nord. "The world is changing, and climate change is already here," said Amy Norman, an Inuk environmental activist from Labrador, during the event. "Already we're seeing impacts here in Labrador and in Newfoundland. Unreliable sea ice, warming temperatures, more frequent storms, unpredictable weather. It's already impacting our ways of life, and it's already changing how we live on these lands."

That reality was thrown into relief last fall, when Hurricane Fiona hit Atlantic Canada. The storm caused more than $800 million in damage, washing away buildings and killing a woman from the town of Port aux Basques, who was swept out to sea along with the contents of her home. The damage, of course, was to be repaired with money from the same provincial coffers to which Bay du Nord is to contribute.

On April 6, the decision finally came down: a green light. Guilbeault declined interview requests for this piece, but in a press release, he implied that this project would be different, held to a laundry list of 137 binding conditions—the strongest ever, he claimed. The government touted its relative greenness, which went beyond its low per-barrel emissions. As a condition of approval, the project will have to achieve net-zero status by 2050, meaning that all of the planet-warming greenhouse gases produced in its operations will have to be offset or captured by carbon-capture technology. On the same day Bay du Nord was approved, the federal government announced that every future fossil-fuel project approved in Canada will also need to achieve net-zero emissions. That makes Bay du Nord not just the next big thing for Newfoundland and Labrador, but a turning point for Canada's fossil-fuel business—an attempt to position it as a sustainable industry fit for a greening world.

To the project's opponents, that's a very, very small victory. The emissions to be offset are what are called upstream emissions, produced during the extraction process itself. But the vast majority of a barrel's carbon footprint comes from downstream emissions, when the oil is burned in a car or a power plant. Those emissions don't count against the net-zero designation.

> ***"There's a patriotism wrapped up in oil and gas," says environmental activist Kerri Neil. "The idea that if you don't support it, then you don't support Newfoundland."***

A month after approval, the group Ecojustice, on behalf of Équiterre and Sierra Club Canada, filed a lawsuit against the federal government, arguing it had failed to consider how downstream emissions will contribute to Bay du Nord's environmental impact. If it had, the suit alleges, the project would contravene Canada's international obligations to fight climate change. Eight Atlantic Canadian Mi'kmaw communities later joined the suit.

"It's great to reduce emissions," says Sierra Club's Conor Curtis, "but reducing upstream doesn't do much. Basically, it means we're not talking about a net-zero project." Instead, he suggests, the stringent conditions on Bay du Nord are an attempt to reconcile Canada's self-image as an environmental leader with its economic interest in a project that will pump hundreds of millions of barrels' worth of oil into the atmosphere. It's "an act of extreme climate hypocrisy," he says.

Of course the same could be said of any oil and gas project. The argument made for Bay du Nord is about relative impact: oil and gas won't disappear overnight, so steps in the right direction, like those 137 binding conditions placed on Equinor, are better than nothing at all. Ken McDonald, Liberal MP for Newfoundland's Avalon riding, made clear the stakes of the federal decision last March, when speaking to the CBC about the project. "If this doesn't go ahead," he asked, "what does?"

Last April, Scott Penney was filling up his truck near the town of Deer Lake, in western Newfoundland, on his way to his daughter's volleyball tournament, when a social media ping on his phone alerted him that Bay du Nord

FACE FACTS To environmental activist Kerri Neil, expanding the oil industry is both a failure to confront the reality of climate change and a refusal to reckon with an economic transition the province must make regardless

was approved. As Penney stepped inside to buy snacks and pay for his fuel, he heard the manager and another customer already talking about the news, moments after it dropped.

Penney is CEO of the Port of Argentia, on the western side of the Avalon Peninsula in eastern Newfoundland, home to about half of the province's population and the city of St. John's. The port is part of a vast network of businesses that will benefit from Bay du Nord—Penney expects at least 1,000 jobs in construction, fabrication, transport, docking, security and even local hotels, which often let out blocks of rooms to workers coming off weeks-long shifts. The port will be a transit and construction hub for the project. "As a Newfoundlander," says Penney, "when you talk about the impact of these industries, and changing the generational outlook, you get almost blurry-eyed."

Work on Bay du Nord hasn't started yet; the province is still negotiating the project's benefits agreement with Equinor, including parameters around how much manufacturing and construction will take place in Newfoundland. But the industry has begun to pick up again.

Amanda Young recently shelved her nursing school application—though she was accepted—when work started again on the Terra Nova platform. She's optimistic now there will be work for years to come on Bay du Nord. So are most Newfoundlanders.

Bay du Nord's opponents aren't blind to this enthusiasm. They see it among friends and family, in their own communities. "There's a patriotism wrapped up in oil and gas," says Kerri Neil, co-chair of the Social Justice Co-operative of Newfoundland and Labrador, which has organized protests against the project. "There's a perspective that if you don't support it, then you don't support Newfoundland."

Robert Greenwood occupies a middle ground. He'd like to see oil revenues used to help transition the province to a new economic footing. "Our oil and gas is produced in an environment with safeguards for workers and environmental regulations," he says. "Shouldn't we continue to provide it? And use those crack-cocaine revenues to invest in hydrogen or wind power?"

This is roughly the perspective put forth in "The Big Reset," a 2021 report commissioned by Newfoundland's provincial government on the province's economic future. "There are no short-term, realistic scenarios to replace petroleum royalty revenues necessary to provide public services," it concluded. It advocated putting up to 50 per cent of oil revenues into a "future fund" to be used for debt repayment and the transition to a green economy. Last year, the province created a fund with that name, though it appears to be mostly intended to pay down debt. The legislation establishing it makes no mention of a green transition.

Today, the booms and busts of the past two decades are apparent everywhere in Newfoundland. Every time Kerri Neil drives from St. John's to her home in Spaniard's Bay, a small community about an hour out of the city, she sees the houses that started construction during boom years, later abandoned when their owners could no longer make mortgage payments. Newfoundland today has Canada's second-highest consumer debt rate, and the third-highest debt delinquency rate.

There's a cruel optimism surrounding any fossil-fuel project. Here's one more chance for wealth—for a while. If the story of Bay du Nord is a patchwork of work and risk, it is threaded by the memory of loss. Young knows that the industry is not forever. But transitioning as quickly as Bay du Nord's opponents hope, she feels, would be an impossible task. "We'd have to change our whole economy and how we think about living here." For Curtis and Neil, that's exactly the point.

Since Bay du Nord was approved, Scott Penney has noticed a change in his employees at the Port of Argentia. "There's a pop in their step," he says. "They know there's work. A lot of times in the last number of years, there's been this fear of when the shoe is going to drop." Today, that question has an answer: not yet. ■

The Grifter Guardian

How Kelowna social worker **Robert Riley Saunders** faked his credentials, charmed his bosses and **stole $460,000** earmarked for the vulnerable kids in his care

Photograph via Facebook

By Sarah Treleaven

In 2007, when Beth was six years old, the Kelowna office of British Columbia's Ministry of Children and Family Development, or MCFD, placed her in foster care while her mother was in a treatment facility for alcoholism. Living in strangers' homes, she faded into the background. She felt like she was no one's priority. By the time she was 14, Beth, a member of the Carrier Sekani First Nations, was homeless and couch-surfing with friends and extended family. (Beth is not her real name; I've agreed to use a pseudonym to protect her privacy.) Kelowna's family services appointed Robert Riley Saunders, a social worker who managed care for Indigenous youth, to handle her case. Once a month, Saunders would take her for lunch. He gave her gift cards that she could spend at the mall. "I thought he was a nice, cool person," she says. Saunders told Beth that she reminded him of his daughter.

One day in 2016, when Beth was 15, Saunders took her to a local branch of Interior Savings Credit Union and told her she needed to open an account. Saunders had done the same thing for Beth's older brother, whose case he also handled. When Saunders and Beth walked into the branch, they were escorted into a private office. Beth saw that he was holding several cheques made out to her. "I got excited," she says. "I was like, 'Are those all for me?' " Saunders chuckled and told her that no, the cheques were not for her. He didn't explain further. "I was confused," she says. "They had my name on them. We were opening an account for me. But the bank dude was just sitting there." The employee handed Beth some paperwork, which she filled out. And then Saunders drove her home. "I guess I thought kids were supposed to have bank accounts," she says. The bank had given her a debit card, but because she believed she didn't have any money, she never used it.

A year later, Beth was back with her mother. Family friends let them stay in spare rooms, until those friends got evicted themselves. Saunders sometimes helped Beth and her mom move to a new place. Beth was pregnant with her first child and signed up for a program in downtown Kelowna for Indigenous job seekers. The program would pay her to attend, but she had to provide banking information. The only bank account she'd ever had was the one that Saunders opened for her, so Beth, her brother and her mom visited the branch. When she asked about her account, a teller handed over a stack of statements indicating numerous deposits and near-immediate transfers of the same funds out of the account. There were tens of thousands of dollars in transactions, but the balance was near zero. Beth's older brother asked for his statements, too, and they showed the same pattern.

Right around this time, just as Beth was starting to suspect something wasn't right, the authorities at the Kelowna family services office began to investigate Saunders. Their investigation would ultimately reveal that Saunders had been doing the unthinkable: stealing government funds earmarked for the most vulnerable kids in our society. He manipulated homeless teens, many of them Indigenous, to sign over funds intended to help them survive. The British Columbia social services system was so poorly organized and badly supervised that his crimes went undetected for years.

LAST YEAR, the ministry budgeted about $50 million in spending for the 4,852 children in its permanent care. A child's social worker—what the MCFD calls a guardianship worker—is responsible for finding them permanent living arrangements, often through adoption, alternate family placements or foster care. This can be particularly challenging in the cases of older children and adolescents. At the age of 16, kids might be approved to live on their own but receive financial support from the MCFD—what's referred to as a Youth Agreement. They might also receive "start-up" funds to help purchase things like furniture, dishes, pots, pans and the other things that transform an empty apartment into a functioning home.

Saunders' salary as an MCFD guardianship worker was about $70,000, but he lived well above his means. He had expensive tastes and he liked to show off. He lived with his wife and their two children in an upscale home on a golf course. He bought a boat and made regular trips to Las Vegas. The seemingly carefree, prosperous nature of Saunders' lifestyle was at odds with the youth in his care, who often struggled to pay for food and lived on the street.

Saunders was born in Winnipeg in 1970, the child of parents who struggled with alcohol addiction and separated when he was in his mid-teens. He'd hoped to become a professional hockey player, a dream that ended when he broke a leg at 16. He enrolled at the University of Manitoba and took some general arts courses but never graduated. By 1995, he started working in Winnipeg as a rehabilitation counsellor at a private agency. A year later, he applied for a job as a social worker with the MCFD in Fort St. John, British Columbia.

There was only one problem: he didn't have the credentials. With the help of his girlfriend at the time, he forged a diploma from the University of Manitoba, claiming he had a bachelor's degree in social work. He was told that he would have to provide a certified copy of his degree, but no one ever followed up with him about it. Saunders exploited another loophole: unlike other social workers in the province, MCFD employees aren't required to register with the BC Association of Social Workers. Because the association obtains all documentation—such as diplomas—directly from institutions rather than prospective members, its staff would have likely discovered his ruse. In 2001, he asked for a transfer to the MCFD's Kelowna office, where he was eventually moved to the group that works with Indigenous permanent wards.

In recent pictures, Saunders, with dark hair and eyes, has the easy grin and conventional if somewhat beefy good looks of a man who is accustomed to things going his way. He appears confident and fun, whether he's beaming over a fluffy golden retriever puppy or clutching a surfboard at an oceanside resort, an expensive-looking watch on his wrist.

I spoke to one woman who met Saunders when he was coaching her daughter's softball team. The kids seemed to like him, but the woman wasn't impressed, describing him as a "typical Kelowna douchebag." Translation: he was arrogant and brash, a loud talker with a machismo-tinged bravado that rubbed some people the wrong way. Still, even those who didn't like Saunders respected him. He was a social worker with the MCFD, after all, a challenging job that surely brought out the best in him.

In 2011, Saunders and his wife divorced, and he needed money. He saw how, despite the frequent reviews and requirements for paperwork and approvals, staff at the MCFD didn't pay close attention to all the cheques issued for kids in their care. Saunders realized he could open joint bank accounts with his charges, take advantage of their lack of financial experience and secretly divert the funds back to himself. He couldn't steal from kids living in foster homes, where the foster parents were expecting cheques from the ministry. And he had to be careful not to target kids who were in fact living independently and paying rent, as they would ask about what funds were available to help them. His sweet spot was the kids who lived on the margins and slipped out of the system—the ones sleeping on the streets, in and out of troubled homes or couchsurfing like Beth. They were kids who often had no one looking out for them. Saunders deliberately steered them away from stability in order to line his own pockets.

One of the kids Saunders bilked was a boy I'll call Henry. He had been in care since he was 14. He wanted to live with his dad, but the situation at home was volatile, and Henry was placed in a series of foster homes. At weekly check-in appointments, Saunders would pass along vouchers for food or clothing, typically for $100 or $120 each. Henry got no more than three vouchers a month, and he was expected to keep receipts to prove that he was spending them as intended. At some point, Saunders took Henry to Interior Savings Credit Union and helped him open an account. Henry never used it again.

When Henry was 16, Freddie Kabok, a youth worker at the Bridge, a social service agency that works in partnership with the ministry to help kids transition out of care, told him about his options for independent living. Henry was an ideal candidate to receive provincial financial support to help pay for rent, food and other necessities—what's called an independent living fund. When Kabok texted Saunders in November of 2017, wanting to discuss Henry, Saunders dismissed Kabok's suggestion. "Henry asked about independent living," Saunders texted. "I have advised him there really is no such thing as far as providing Henry with his own place. So if he ever mentions it to you please don't encourage it."

By this point, Saunders had already been collecting cheques in Henry's name for more than a year. From March of 2016 to January of 2018, Saunders issued two cheques a month for $579 each, which he then deposited into their joint account—a total of more than $50,000.

Photographs via Facebook

Saunders was doing the same with a dozen other kids. He'd create false documents to facilitate the issuance of cheques by the MCFD, forge the signatures of both the kids in his care and his supervisors, approve his own cheque requests, and fill out paperwork to make it appear that he had forwarded the cheques to the intended recipients. He thought he'd covered his tracks.

Good times While pilfering money intended for kids in his care, Saunders lived large, buying a boat and a house on a golf course and going on tropical vacations

Saunders targeted kids who lived on the margins and slipped out of the system, who were living on the streets, in and out of troubled homes or couchsurfing. Kids who had no one looking out for them.

IN DECEMBER OF 2017, Saunders' usual supervisor, Siobhan Stynes, was on vacation and a social worker named Andrea Courtney was filling in as the team lead. Saunders was usually able to both request and approve cheques for children in his care, but some payments still required a supervisor's signature. In Courtney's inbox were 10 forms from Saunders awaiting her approval, and one of them caught her attention. It was a request for independent living funds for a kid I'll call Quentin, whom Courtney was familiar with. She knew that Quentin was in youth custody and therefore not entitled to independent living funds. She called Saunders to ask why he was issuing cheques to an individual who didn't need the funds. Saunders told her that he was giving the cheques to Quentin's mother. But when Courtney called her, she said she hadn't received any money from the MCFD in years.

That same month, Beth showed up at the Kelowna family services office after she'd discovered the transactions in her account. She asked Courtney if someone could explain why there was money moving in and out. Had those cheques in fact been for her? Did this have something to do with Saunders? Courtney told Beth that she was on the right track—and that she would soon get answers.

When Courtney next spoke to Saunders, his story changed. This time, he claimed that he was depositing the cheques in Quentin's account for when Quentin got out of jail. Courtney asked Saunders to provide screenshots of the bank transactions; he said he would, but he never did. Courtney, now sure that something was very wrong, told Saunders that he needed to come clean. She suggested they go to their manager together, but Saunders refused. He kept telling her to drop it, that there was no need to look into the matter any further.

Courtney did keep looking, and she and another manager ultimately reported Saunders to ministry officials. An investigation uncovered a pattern of fraud. Officials soon learned that, under the guise of paternalistic concern, Saunders would take his kids to TD Bank or Interior Savings Credit Union and help them open an account. It was his duty as a social worker to help them learn the ropes of financial management. But he was actually opening joint accounts. Saunders would have cheques issued for the youth in his care—victims A through X, as they were later known in court documents—and deposit the money into those accounts. Almost immediately, he would transfer those funds into his personal account or use them to pay off his credit card bills. Over a six-and-a-half-year period, Saunders had the MCFD issue more than

Photograph courtesy of Jacqueline Gelineau/Black Press Media

Saunders opened joint accounts with the kids in his care and tried to cover his tracks. He created false documents to issue cheques and forged the signatures of his supervisors.

850 cheques totalling over $460,000—an average of $541 per cheque.

Over the years, his thefts got bigger. In 2015, the amount he transferred through those joint accounts was $81,641. In 2016, it was $104,431. And in 2017, it was $125,200. A man whose job was to protect and support vulnerable Indigenous youth was taking their money. And his employer—the government—had made it easy for him to get away with it.

AFTER COURTNEY presented evidence of his fraud to ministry officials, Saunders was suspended with pay in January of 2018. He disappeared from Kelowna just as word of his many transgressions hit the local news. The RCMP tracked him down in Calgary, where he had been living with one of his sisters and working at a golf course and then a pet store. The cops brought him back to Kelowna to face multiple counts.

In September of 2021, Saunders pleaded guilty to three charges: defrauding the province, forging a university diploma and breaching public trust. In court last summer, Saunders appeared to be humbled; he was sorry, he said. He wished he could roll back the clock and make things better. If he knew then what he knew now—principally, one assumes, that he would be busted—he would make different choices. (I received no replies when I contacted Saunders and his lawyer.)

Saunders was willing to acknowledge that he'd abused his position as a social worker to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars from the ministry. What he wouldn't do was admit that he had caused harm to the youth in his care.

Saunders told the court that he viewed his work with youth as an exercise in futility. He blamed the kids for their own outcomes, citing their lifestyles of addiction and criminal behaviour. He also blamed holes in the province's social work system for the fact that he was able to defraud it, and even pointed a finger at his superiors for not catching him in the act sooner. He said that a kid who didn't have a home didn't need government money.

He didn't think they could be trusted to spend it responsibly.

This argument didn't fly. Steven Wilson, the presiding judge at the criminal hearings, found that Saunders not only acted contrary to the best interests of the youth in his care, but that his actions resulted in material and sometimes emotional deprivation. Some kids alleged that he could be cruel. In one civil complaint, an Indigenous youth said that Saunders subjected her to chronic verbal and emotional abuse, intentionally undermining her sense of self-worth so as to dissuade her from the belief that she might be entitled to financial support from the province for basic needs like food, clothing or shelter. She ended up homeless and hungry. At times, she was hooked on hard drugs like meth, crack and cocaine.

Wilson's pre-sentence report described Saunders as having a flexible moral compass and indifferent to how his actions might affect others. "This moral ambivalence prevented him from gaining genuine insight into his behaviour until, that is, he got caught and must now face the consequences," states the report. In July, he was sentenced to five years in prison.

SAUNDERS WASN'T an individual bad actor who exploited an otherwise decent system. The neglect seems to extend far beyond him. Andrea Courtney had been acting supervisor for only one hour when she cottoned on to Saunders' transgressions. She explained to the court that it typically takes five people to issue a cheque: one to make the cheque request, one to approve it, one to print the cheque and another two to sign it. In Saunders' case, he was able to input and approve cheque requests with no oversight, forging signatures when necessary. Wilson noted that Saunders' fraud should have been obvious.

Especially because there were early signs of trouble. Saunders was known among colleagues for his lack of diligence and sloppy note-taking, which was something his supervisors never seemed particularly concerned about. He failed to complete the required youth care plans and he didn't prepare any of his charges for aging out of care. This is a formal process that's supposed to begin when a kid is 15, where they learn about how to find housing, obtain appropriate ID and file taxes. Saunders even kept incomplete contact information for some of his kids.

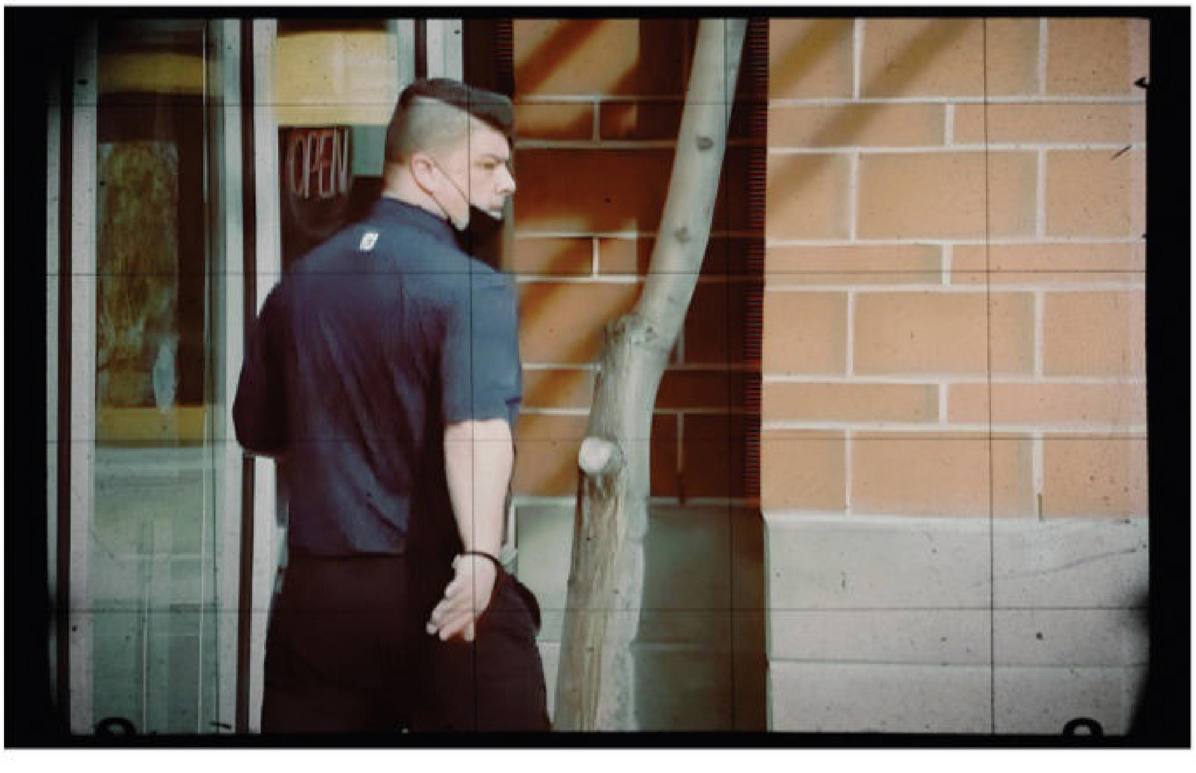
A 2003 performance review noted that he had been reprimanded for making disparaging remarks about Indigenous children. Saunders was also admonished in 2004, that time for withholding a client's money and deliberately avoiding oversight of financial transactions. Yet later that year, Saunders' supervisors thought highly enough of his work to assign him to a unit that specialized in high-risk Indigenous youth.

One counsellor who often worked with Saunders told me how he flaked on the kids, ignored their calls, withheld resources and failed to inform them about meetings related to their care. Once, during a mediation, she was shocked when Saunders talked about the youth, who was present, without directly addressing or involving them. The counsellor kept interrupting to make sure the teen understood and to determine whether they had any questions. Saunders' most recent supervisor, Siobhan Stynes, who was also present at the meeting, observed passively. "She let him run the show," says the counsellor.

According to the province's Child, Family and Community Service Act, children in care have the right to be nurtured, to be consulted about significant decisions affecting them, to be informed about their plans of care and to receive guidance related to their cultural heritage. Guardianship workers must have in-person, private visits with children and youth at least every 90 days, and more frequently if possible. They are supposed to be there for birthdays and other special occasions. Workers are expected to share care plans and progress with their team lead, typically on a weekly basis.

Saunders was careless about completing the plan of care documents for his kids, but he was far from the only offender—an MCFD audit in 2020 found that up to 15 per cent of cases had incomplete plans. During an internal investigation prompted by Courtney's discoveries, Saunders himself admitted that he was emboldened because his employer turned a blind eye and there was little accountability to ensure he was actually caring for the kids entrusted to him. When no one flagged the first illicit payments, he decided to keep going.

Jennifer Charlesworth, who leads the province's office charged with monitoring children and youth services, believes Saunders was enabled by a culture of silence at the MCFD, and that employees stuck together rather than flagging concerns—until Andrea Courtney stepped into a leadership role and broke the pattern.



Photograph courtesy of Nich Johansen/Castanet News

Busted Saunders pleaded guilty to three charges, but told the court that he viewed his job as an "exercise in futility" and that he blamed the social work system for allowing him to get away with fraud for as long as he did

The MCFD declined my interview request, but a spokesperson, Gayle Mavor, provided a written statement. “We offer our heartfelt apologies to all the young people who have been affected,” it reads.

In response to the Saunders revelations, the MCFD conducted internal reviews, partnered with professional organizations for additional oversight and provided compensation of approximately $15 million to the kids Saunders stole from. The Office of the Provincial Director of Child Welfare launched its own special review, including interviews with children and youth in care, along with their families. At least one high-ranking MCFD director was fired, but none of Saunders’ immediate colleagues have been charged. Perhaps the most significant change is that staff are no longer able to initiate and print cheques without the involvement of a second staff member. And yet as far as I can tell, the MCFD has taken zero action to address the institutional neglect that some of its employees and kids in care have raised.

The BC Association of Social Workers is now campaigning to have the law regulating social workers in British Columbia amended so that MCFD workers are required to register with the college. That would prevent someone unqualified, like Saunders, from gaining work with the ministry.

MCFD has launched a consultation related to the oversight of social work, and the report should be released in April. But Michael Crawford, the association’s president, says that in recent years the MCFD has loosened, not tightened, restrictions. Years of recruitment challenges and high turnover led to a change in January of 2019 regarding the education child protection workers need. Whereas before they required a degree in social work, now a degree in a relevant “human services field” is sufficient.

The Saunders case underscores the over-representation of Indigenous children in government care. According to the MCFD, the 2019 rate of children in care in British Columbia was 6.76 per 1,000 for all children and youth across the province but was 43.8 per 1,000 for Indigenous children and youth. Cheryl Casimer, the political executive of First Nations Summit, a B.C. political organization comprised of First Nations and tribal councils, says that the child welfare system that currently exists might as well be an extension of the residential school system. “It’s not a system that was created to nurture and care for Indigenous people,” she says. “And it certainly doesn’t have the supports to nurture the traditions and culture and the connectivity and language required for kids to thrive. So, our youth in those systems of so-called care end up moving to the justice system. It’s a vicious cycle.”

Meanwhile, those formerly under Saunders’ care launched some two dozen civil suits, naming both the MCFD and Interior Savings Banking Union (which has denied culpability) as knowing or unknowing co-conspirators. The civil suits alleged that Saunders chose high-risk Indigenous youth as his targets because they were already disregarded and Saunders knew that if they complained about him, his supervisors and managers likely wouldn’t believe them. “They were the most marginalized, the most disconnected and the ones who were the least likely to raise any concerns because they didn’t know that they had rights,” says Charlesworth. “And no one was asking them, what’s your experience? Are you feeling well supported?”

Some of Saunders’ former charges got six-figure settlements—a fortuitous turn after years of deprivation

Michael Patterson, a lawyer in Penticton who represented several people in this case, says it’s proof of a broken institution. “He could have put these kids in a crack house, and no one would have batted an eye.”

One of Saunders’ former charges, who I’ll call April, wishes that there had been some form of Indigenous-led restorative justice process. “It would’ve been nice if the kids had been able to express to him how he’s affected their lives,” she says. She describes a lingering sense that she just wasn’t important enough to protect, plus a general distrust of authorities. Today, she has a disabled son and finds interactions with social workers a challenge. The anger and anxiety haven’t gone away. “I think it will last forever,” she says.

Some people are forced to contend with proximate and generational trauma. Others, like Saunders, are Teflon. As a result of his actions, he was pushed out of his job and publicly humiliated, and his relationship with his two children is reportedly strained. But the court documents also talk about the sisters who love him, his second-chance employment with a landscaping company and a new relationship with a woman who supported him throughout his reckoning. Robert Riley Saunders, unlike the kids in his care, had such a massive head start in life that he was back on his feet even before he went to prison.

A group of Saunders’ victims joined a class-action lawsuit against MCFD that claimed the system had failed them for decades. The MCFD settled the class action in 2020, acknowledging responsibility. Some of the complainants ended up with six-figure settlements from the province—a fortuitous turn after years of deprivation.

Beth was part of the class action. She ended up with a sizable settlement, which she used to buy a truck and a five-bedroom home for herself and her two small children. The money doesn’t make up for what happened, but she’s happy to use it to build a secure life for her family.

With such a big home, Beth is considering becoming a foster parent. She’s been mostly on her own for as long as she can remember, and she wants to give kids a different experience than the one she had. “Saunders did not support me,” she says. “He didn’t help me the way that he should have. He saw all of us kids drowning, and he was okay with it.” ■

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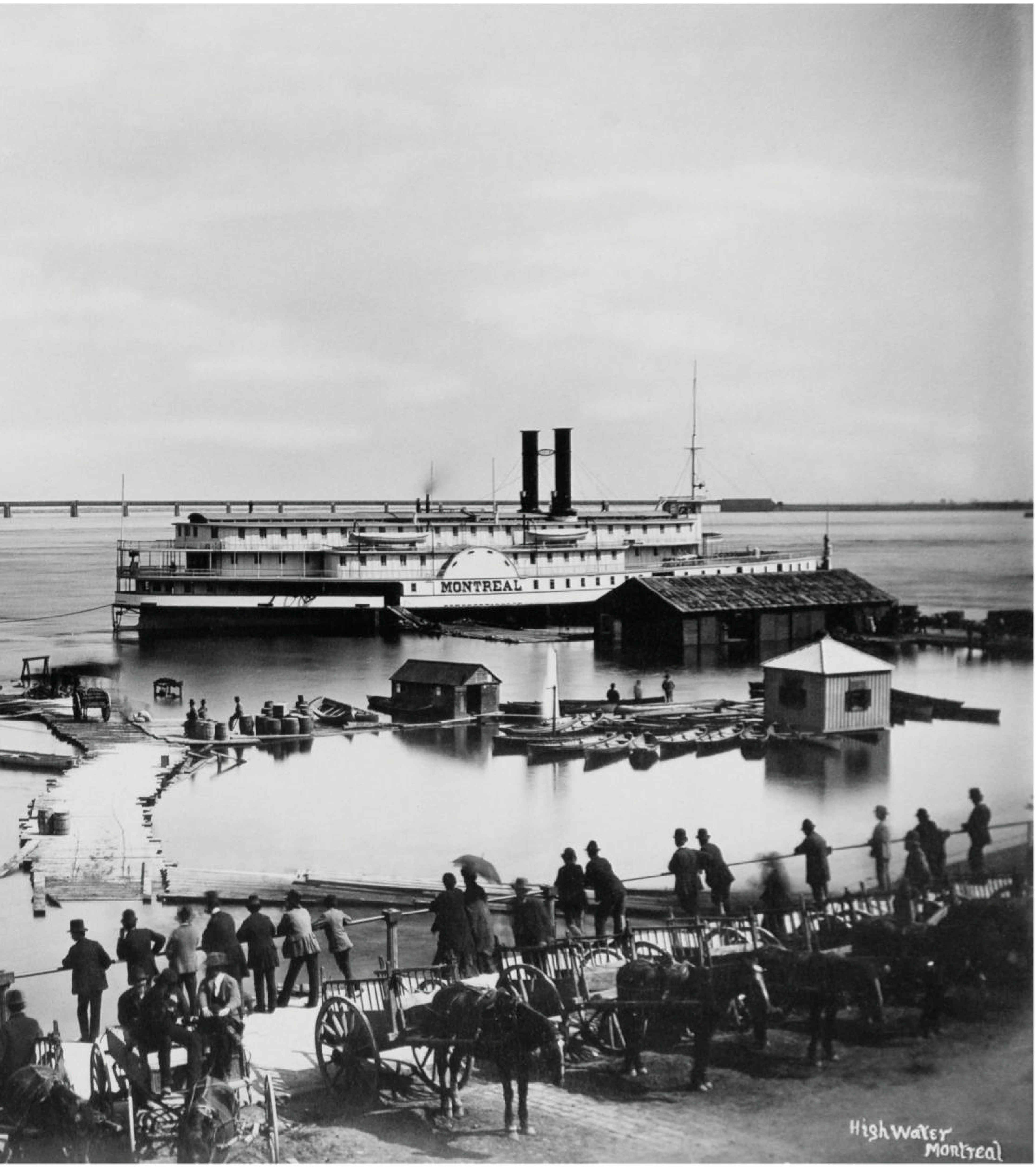
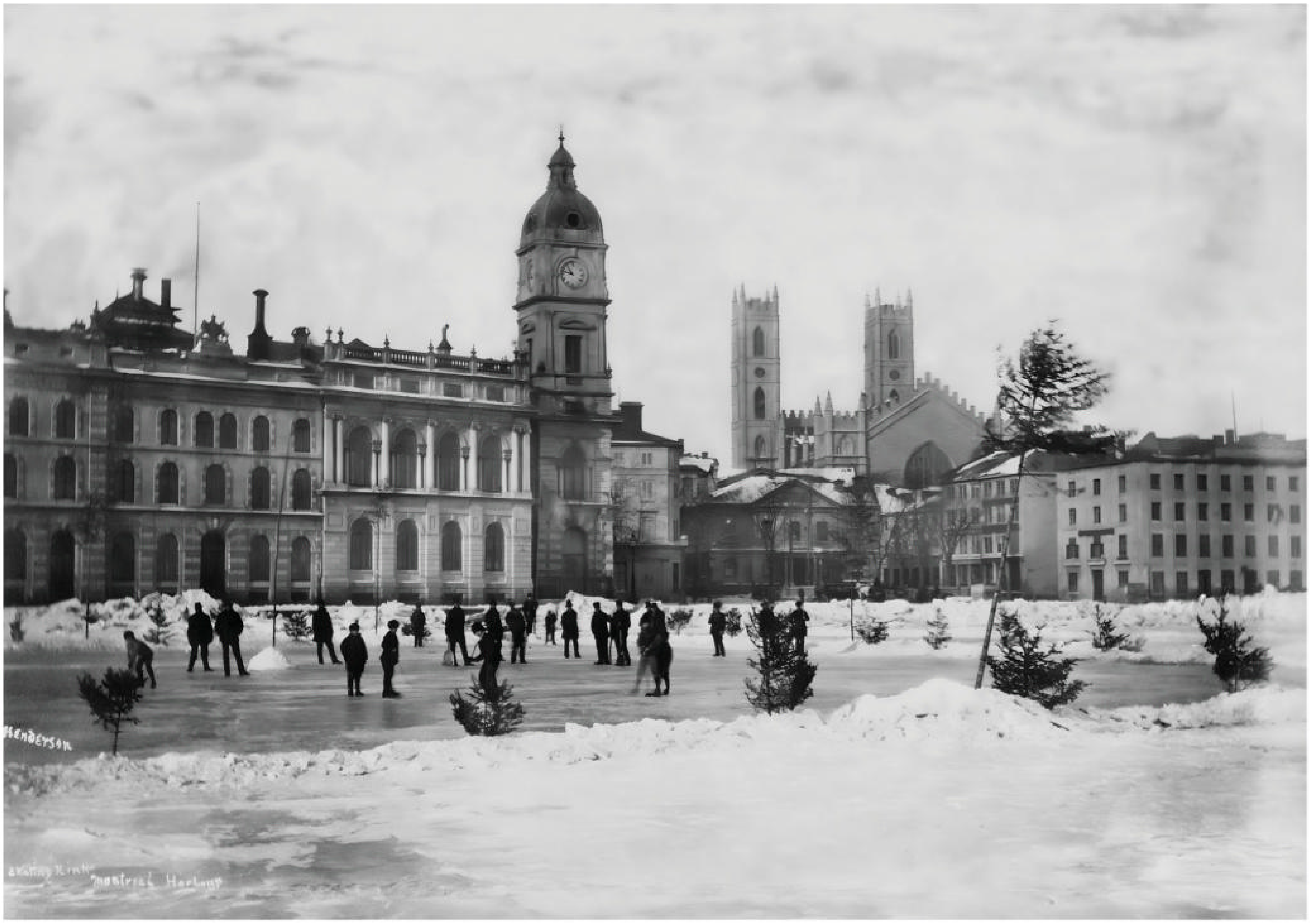
The Explorer

ALEXANDER HENDERSON *emigrated from Scotland to Quebec in 1855. He spent decades photographing the province's dazzling landscapes and burgeoning cities. And his work was almost lost forever.*

By Mathew Silver


MONTREAL
High Water
Montreal

HIGHWATER, MONTREAL HARBOUR, C. 1870
This shot depicts steamboats in the Montreal harbour when the St. Lawrence was at its highest levels, with the famous Victoria Bridge in the background. Gathering to watch the ships in the harbour was a popular Sunday activity.



ALEXANDER HENDERSON was part artist, part documentarian. In the late 19th century, he was one of the most prominent photographers in Canada, shooting lively urban scenes and idyllic rural landscapes in a sweeping style reminiscent of the great Romantic painters.

Henderson's photographs are pure Canadiana: a cluster of ice skaters on Montreal's harbour, Indigenous people camping on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, railmen working on the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia. His images are as haunting as they are beautiful. The subjects often stare coldly into the camera from far in the distance, seeming more like spectres than human beings.

Henderson chronicled a crucial period in Canadian history. British colonialism was boosting Quebec's population, driving industry and shaping cultural life, all the while encroaching on Indigenous territory. Immigrants flocked to Montreal, where milling, brewing, textiles and shipbuilding had replaced the fur trade. Railway expansion turned the city into a major trade and travel hub, and cultural institutions like McGill and the Museum of Fine Arts were opening up. Between 1844 and 1911, Montreal's population swelled from nearly 45,000 to more than 500,000, making it Canada's biggest metropolis. (Toronto usurped it soon after.) Henderson was prolific during this period.

He was a descendant of Scottish gentry who enjoyed a comfortable upbringing in Edinburgh. His grandfather, Alexander Sr., had been the first chairman of the National Bank of Scotland and the lord provost of Edinburgh. Growing up, Henderson spent a lot of time at Press Castle, a large mansion on the family's 650-acre property southeast of Edinburgh. He immersed himself in nature, exploring the neighbouring woods, hills and mountains.

Henderson studied accounting for a few years, but an experience in 1851 led him

SKATING RINK, MONTREAL HARBOUR, C. 1870
In the foreground of this landscape, ice skaters glide across the frozen harbour in the winter. In the background, the building on the left is the custom house, where merchants would have their imported goods inspected and approved. And on the right is Notre-Dame Basilica, known at the time as the French Cathedral.

MONTARVILLE MANOR HOUSE, SAINT BRUNO MOUNTAIN, C. 1870
This photo was taken in Montarville, located east of Montreal. From 1627 to 1854, Quebec operated under France's seigneurial system, in which the state granted people land in exchange for royalties. The officials who governed the area were known as seigneurs. And the seigneur of Montarville lived in this house, which dates back to around 1774. The manor was demolished in 1903.

FLOOD, SAINT PAUL STREET, MONTREAL, 1864
Montreal flooded several times throughout the 1860s—either due to rising tidewaters breaking over the banks of the St. Lawrence River or leftover winter snowfall melting in the spring. Some Montrealers even kept rafts at their properties in case the city turned into Waterworld. This image shows one of those infamous floods, with horse-drawn carriages trudging through the water and Montrealers staying dry atop wooden pallets.

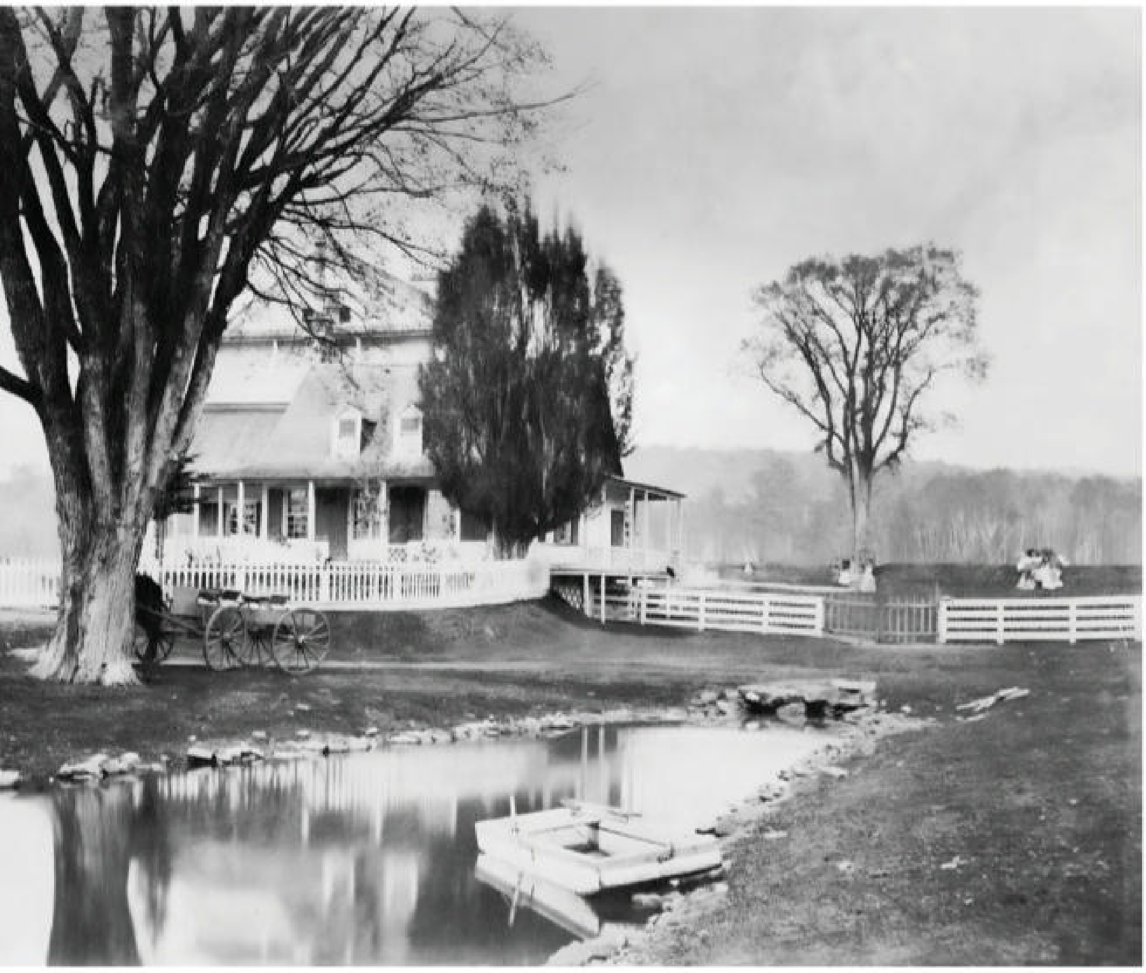
toward a career in the arts. At the age of 19, Henderson took a two-week trip to London for the Great Exhibition, where he encountered the works of famous British artists. The paintings had a huge influence on Henderson, and his future work borrowed heavily from the Romantic style, adopting an emphasis on nature, the inclusion of expressive characters to create mood and the use of light effects to enhance textures and soften edges.

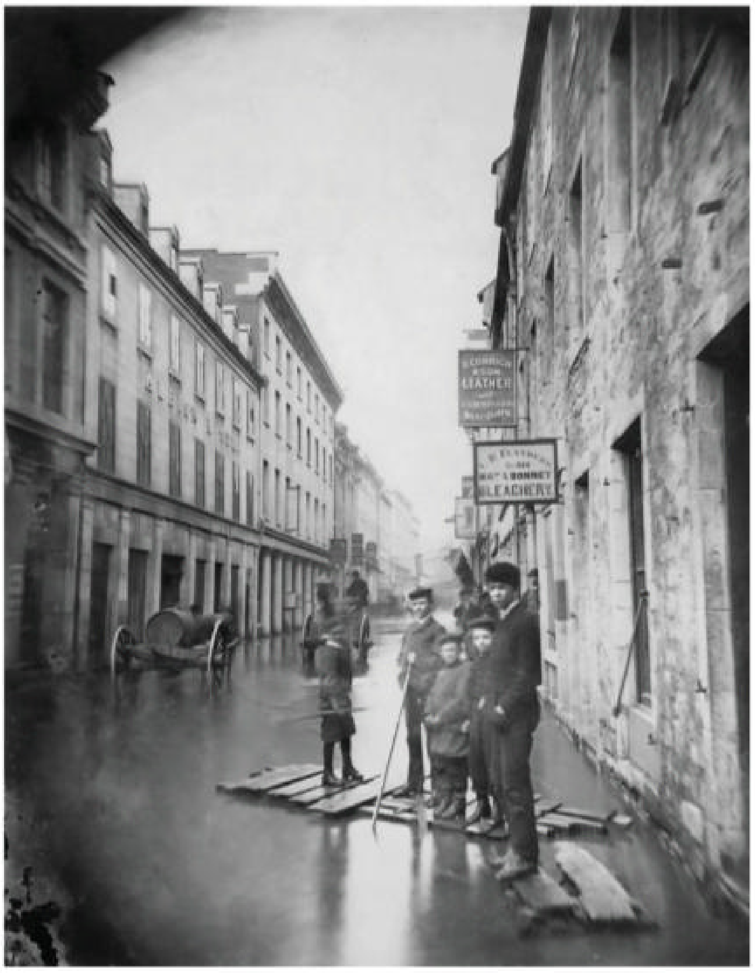
In 1855, Henderson and his new bride, Agnes, immigrated to Canada. Like the throngs of other Brits who migrated across the Atlantic as part of colonial expansion, they imagined a new, exciting life in Quebec, which had a booming port economy, a rich cultural scene, a robust population of British expats and plenty of untrammelled outdoor space for fishing and hunting. They rode a steamboat called the Baltic from Liverpool to New York and train-hopped up to Montreal, where they eventually settled in a wealthy community west of downtown (now known as Golden Square Mile).

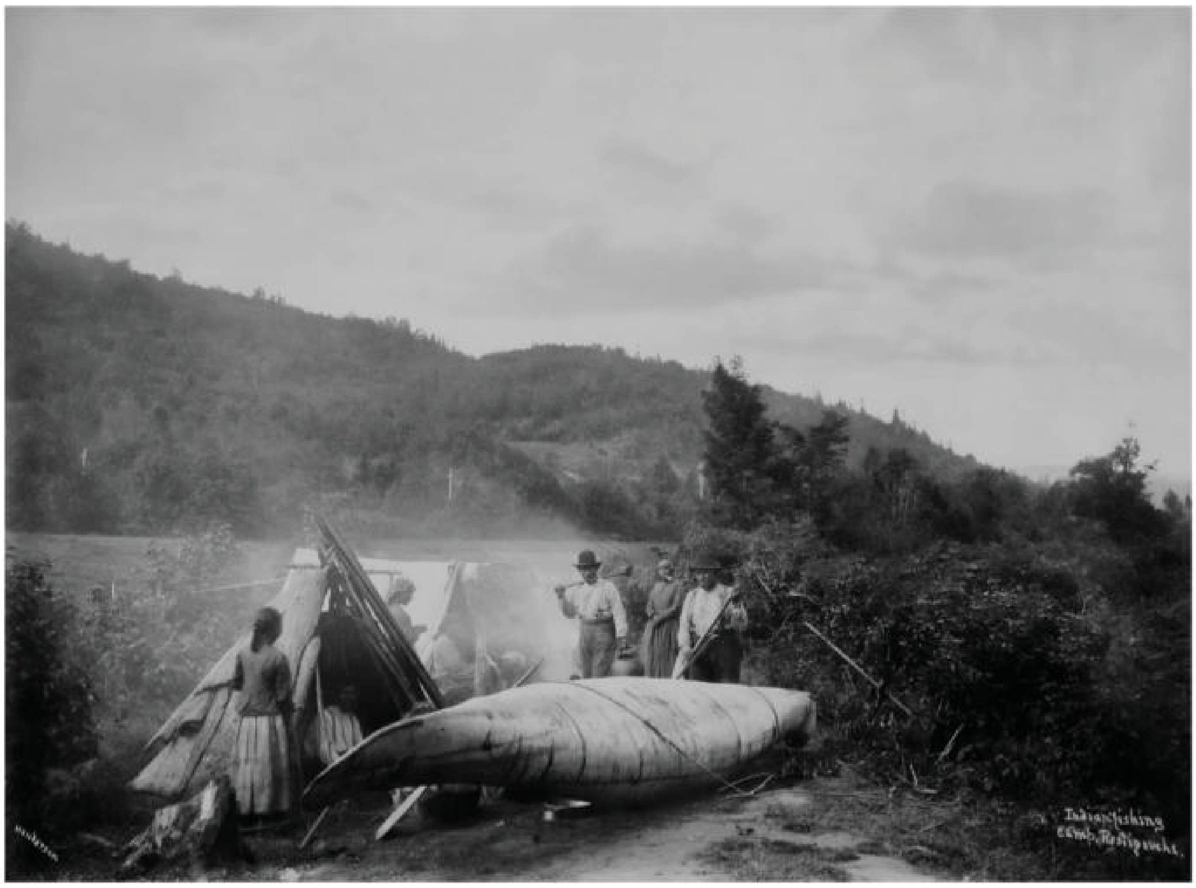
The couple started a family (nine children in total, five of whom survived into adulthood) and wasted little time establishing themselves among the local elites, leveraging their wealth and social status. Henderson was treasurer of the Montreal Fish and Game Protection Club, contributed to the Art Association of Montreal and enlisted in the Victoria Rifles. He also became acquainted with the prominent photographer William Notman, McGill College principal John William Dawson and renowned geologist Alfred Selwyn, among other bigwigs.

Henderson worked briefly as a merchant, but owing to his inheritance, he had no need for a traditional career. Instead, beginning around 1857, he pursued his newfound passion for photography, then an emerging technology, which struck a perfect balance between his love of art and the outdoors. By 1866, Henderson published his first book of photographs and opened a studio in Phillips Square, advertising himself as a portrait and landscape photographer.

Henderson saw—and photographed—Canada with the eye of an outsider, drawn to scenes that would have been novel for someone from Scotland. He showed a particular interest in our frigid, snow-packed winters. His landscapes featured urban sights, like steamboats in the harbour;







INDIGENOUS FISHING CAMP, RESTIGOUCHE RIVER, C. 1870
This image depicts members of the Mi'kmaq Nation fishing on the Restigouche River, which flows between Quebec and New Brunswick. Back then, wealthy travellers went there to cast their rods. At this point in his career, Henderson had opened his first studio and established himself as a professional. He carried some of his equipment in a fisherman basket for convenience. He would have developed photos like this and sold them to tourists in shops or hotels.

SPRING INUNDATION NEAR MONTREAL, 1865
Shot during Henderson's amateur days, this is one of his most iconic photographs, showing a man and two children in a boat just off the south shore of the island of Montreal

traditional Canadian activities, such as ice skating and tobogganing; and older buildings, which evoked the historic architecture of his native Britain.

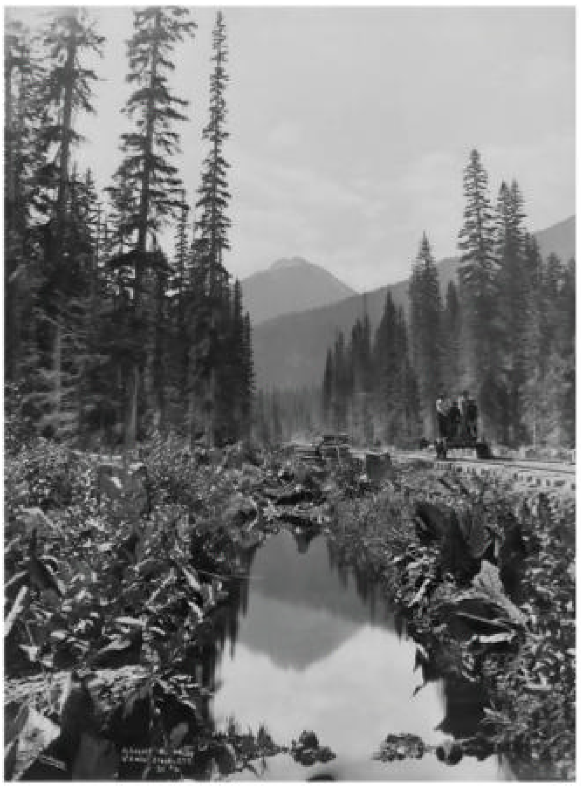
Over the years, Henderson travelled across Quebec, camera in tow. In the 1870s, beer tycoon John Thomas Molson took regular trips with his family on his yacht, the Nooya, snaking through the lower St. Lawrence and the Maritimes. Henderson joined him on a couple of voyages, photographing the yacht, cod-fishing stations, seashore landscapes and Molson's family. He used a field camera, capturing images on glass plates that were later developed in a dark room.

In 1892, when the Canadian Pacific Railway created its own photography department, they brought Henderson on to oversee it, with a starting salary of $167 a month. The work took him out west, where he documented progress on the railway, broadening the scope of his portfolio.

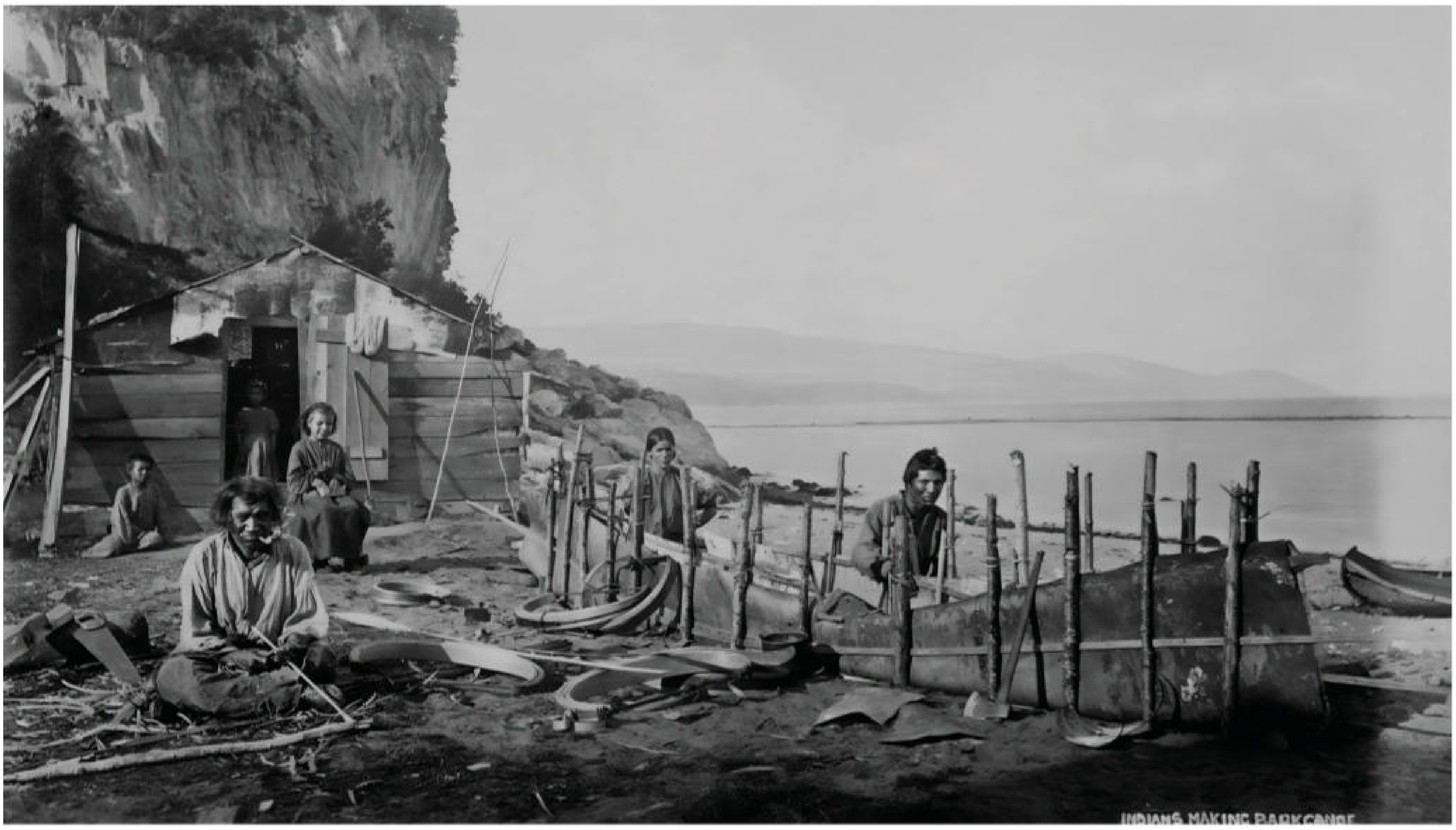
Henderson died in 1913. By then, he'd fallen into obscurity. His obituary made no mention of his work as a photographer. All of his glass negatives, the accumulation of his life's work, were left in the basement of the family home. And years later, in 1965, his grandson threw them in the garbage, destroying much of Henderson's legacy.

The story could have ended there. But that year, Stanley G. Triggs, former curator of the photography collection at the McCord Stewart Museum in Montreal, discovered several hundred Henderson prints while looking through the museum archives. The photos were mesmerizing, but Triggs couldn't find any information about Henderson's life. Eventually, Triggs collected some 2,000 prints from Henderson's family, which he believes is only a sliver of his total photographic output.

From now until mid-April, more than 250 period prints and reproductions of photographs are on display at the McCord Stewart, as part of the exhibit *Alexander Henderson—Art and Nature.* Throughout his career, Henderson exhibited his work in Montreal, London, Edinburgh, Dublin, Paris, New York and Philadelphia. But this exhibit, more than a century after his death, is the first major museum retrospective in his adopted home country. ■



BEAVER RIVER VALLEY, NEAR SIX MILE CREEK, CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY, B.C., 1885
In 1885, Henderson travelled out west to British Columbia. His images of the railway were so popular that seven years later he became head of the photography department for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The CPR would have used his images to showcase work on the railway and to sell as souvenirs to tourists.



MAKING A BARK CANOE, MURRAY BAY, BEFORE 1865
Early in his career, Henderson still considered himself an amateur. He spent a lot of time travelling around rural Quebec, documenting the landscape. This photo was taken in Murray Bay, located northeast of Montreal, along the banks of the St. Lawrence. It was a popular spot for tourists from across Quebec and the United States. Members of the Mi'kmaq Nation set up camp in the area and sold their handicrafts, baskets and objects.

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THE WINNIPEG CHRONICLES

Scoping out the best spots for food, drink and art in Manitoba's vibrant cultural hub

By Corey Mintz

WINNIPEG IS ON THE CUSP between the old and the new. Some architecture still bears "ghost signs" for brands like Wilder's Stomach Powder, and although these exteriors can give the impression of a tomb, their interiors reveal a city in a chrysalis stage. Historic buildings are turning into invaluable institutions: in 2022, Hudson's Bay gave its six-storey landmark to the Southern Chiefs' Organization, with plans to turn it into affordable housing, an art gallery and more. (It was symbolically traded for two beaver pelts and two elk hides.) There's a modern culinary campus for Red River College Polytechnic, and young entrepreneurs are opening pop-up vintage stores. The city is at an exciting crossroads, and these spots are a window into its future.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DANIEL NEUHAUS**

THE HOT SPOT

FARM FRESH Since it's hard to grow crops in Manitoba's climate year-round, Nola is trying new preservation techniques to make the most out of the province's fruit and vegetables

1

BEST VEGGIES

NOLA

101–300 Tache Avenue

nolawpg.com

A LOT OF RESTAURANTS CLAIM to be steering away from animal proteins, but chef Emily Butcher actually shines a spotlight on vegetables. Take, for example, a dish of carrots glazed in local honey and butter, spiced with cumin, coriander and paprika, heaped over whipped Macedonian-style feta and garnished with candied pumpkin seeds. "Celebrating vegetables is difficult in Manitoba," Butcher says. But Nola treats its produce adoringly and honours other Manitoba staples like goldeye—a smoked fish you won't be allowed to leave the province without tasting.

2

MOST INTIMATE DINING

PETIT SOCCO
256 Stafford Street
petitsoccowpg.ca

AT THEIR 10-SEAT RESTAURANT, co-owners Courtney Molaro and Adam Donnelly keep a tight menu of five to six items, including bread and dessert. "It's out of necessity," says Donnelly, who's also the chef. "It's just me in the kitchen." This strategy also speaks to his confidence. Why make something for everyone when you believe in the quality of your concise menu? He bakes sourdough with einkorn, spelt and rye flours, served without butter or olive oil. It's meant to be eaten throughout the meal alongside charcuterie, seasonal cheeses and family-style dishes, which often feature seafood or meat, rounded off with freshly made desserts like apple brioche tart.

LIMITED-TIME OFFER Book ahead if you want to eat at this intimate restaurant, which is only open Wednesday to Saturday

BEST ATMOSPHERE

ROSÉ COFFEE & WINE
474 Main Street, Unit B
rosecoffeeandwine.ca

3 ENTERING KIEU NGUYEN'S 625-square-foot shop feels like being nestled inside a jewellery box: translucent pink curtains illuminate red velvet drapes, a pink and crimson rug, and chairs upholstered in black velvet. By day, the shop offers top-drawer espresso and flaky pastries. At night, after the champagne buckets come out, the tiny room transforms into a sexy wine bar with intimate booths and a succinct menu of oysters, charcuterie and tartines.

BEST ART MUSEUM

QAUMAJUQ
300 Memorial Boulevard
wag.ca/about/qaumajuq

4 IN THE INUIT ART and culture space Qaumajuq (pronounced kow-ma-yourk), there are harpoon heads made of ivory and contemporary carvings of stone, whale bone and caribou antler. This art centre stands in stark contrast to the rest of the city, much of which is named after colonists who stole Indigenous land and resources. The museum opened in 2021 as part of the Winnipeg Art Gallery (now known as WAG-Qaumajuq), and in April it will exhibit over 400 works by Inuit people that date as far back as 200 BCE.

BEST GREENERY

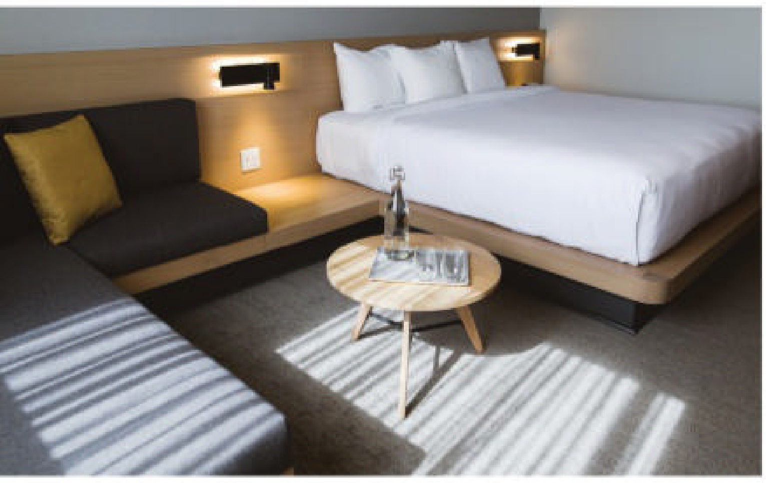
THE LEAF
145 The Leaf Way
assiniboinepark.ca/leaf/lifegrows

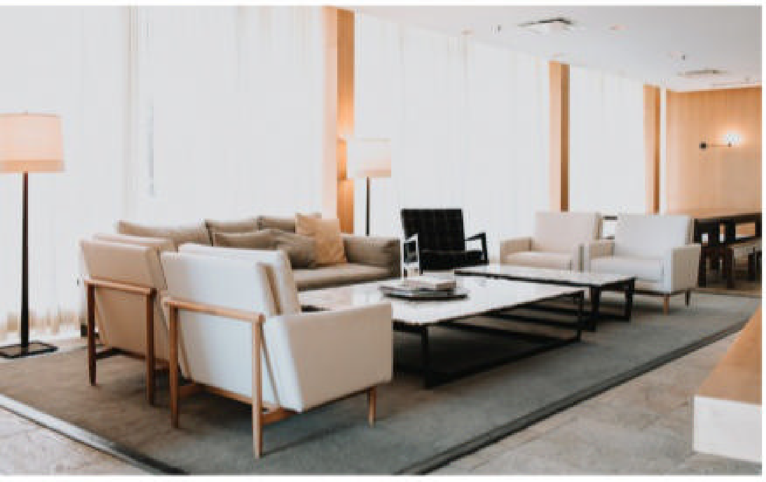
5 THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING can feel like a prank in Winnipeg, rarely showing any signs of new life. Except at the Leaf in Assiniboine Park, a new attraction where biomes are devoted year-round to lush indoor habitats, including a tropical rainforest, a butterfly garden and another space filled with the cool flora of the Mediterranean. If you're there before March 19, visit the Babs Asper Display House, which will be in full bloom.

Qaumajuq by Lindsay Reid, hotels courtesy of the subjects

Where to Stay

At Winnipeg's hotels, you'll find rest, relaxation and a glimpse of the city's past





BEST SPLURGE

INN AT THE FORKS
75 Forks Market Road
innforks.com

VISITORS WHO WANT to take in the best of the city should stay at this luxury boutique hotel, located in the Forks, a roughly 54-acre public space where the Assiniboine and Red rivers meet. The rooms are sleek and minimalist (they start at $199) and the hotel's in-house spa offers a full range of services. Nearby are the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and a food hall with over two dozen vendors, where a bag of lemon-pepper-seasoned fried pickerel bites from Fergie's Fish'n Chips—available in limited quantities in the afternoon—is the ultimate secret snack.

BEST BUDGET

FORT GARRY HOTEL
222 Broadway
fortgarryhotel.com

MIRRORING THE CITY'S FORTUNES, this hotel has had its ups and downs, with ownership changing hands many times since opening in 1913. It's where Prince (now King) Charles stayed in 1979—he was fed goldeye, like every other visitor—and it has been reinstated as the city's premier accommodation (rooms start at $157). The restaurant features a French-leaning menu and a deep wine list, and at Ten Spa, mint tea and nibbles of Turkish delight are available alongside a Turkish hammam and fancy treatments (like an olive oil wash).

LOCAL FAVOURITE

"Down the street from my West Broadway apartment is **the Tallest Poppy**, a colourful restaurant that hosts drag brunches. It's where I chat with friends over local beers, fried tofu sandwiches and hummus plates. On weekends, we eat Talia's Breakfast (named for the owner and chef)."

—

Dee Barsy
ARTIST

Happening This Month

ALVVAYS
MARCH 8, BURTON CUMMINGS THEATRE
alvvays.com

The former Walker Theatre was built in 1907 and reborn in the 1990s as a live venue with heritage status. In recent years, the golden balconies and 1,579 poppy-red seats have been refurbished for a new generation of performers, such as Alvvays, the power-pop quintet currently touring their 2022 album, *Blue Rev*. Before the show, it's a short walk for mussels and tartare at the Amsterdam Tea Room or steamed dumplings and lotus sticky rice at Kum Koon Garden, a dim sum restaurant with cart service.

ILLUSTRATION BY **ANTONY HARE**

Habitat

THE COUNTRY'S MOST CREATIVE LIVING SPACES

PHOTOGRAPH BY **NICK DIGNARD**

SWISH CHALET

Surrounded by a lush forest and sublime trails, this micro-home is an escapist fantasy

By Isabel Slone

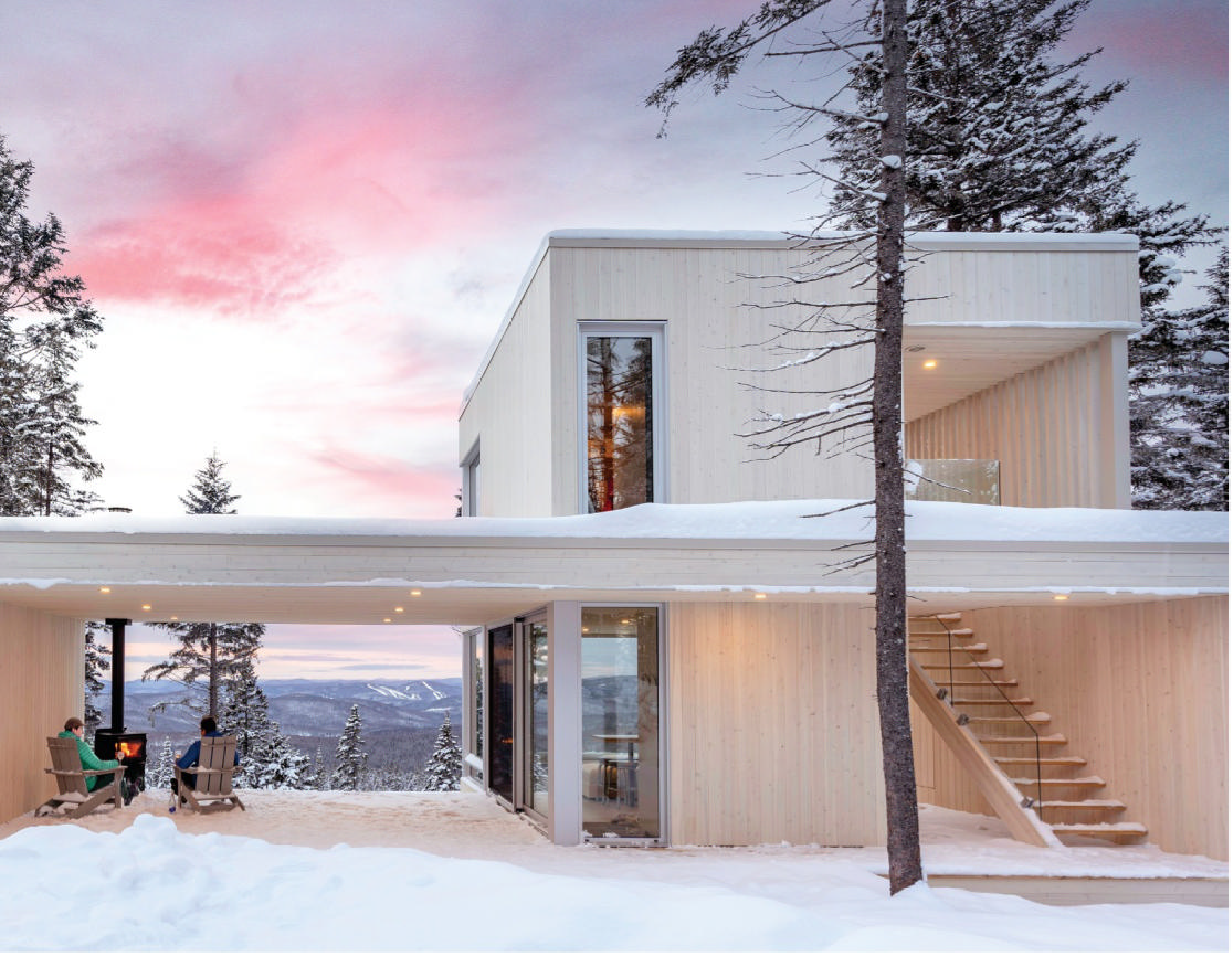
WHEN NICOLAS SAUVE was a child, his parents would take him and his sister to a rented cabin by Lac-Saint-Joseph near Quebec City, where he learned to windsurf and practised soccer, taking free kicks against the cabin's cement wall. Eventually, his passion for outdoor sports became a career. He criss-crossed the globe as a professional snowboarder for 12 years, clinching two medals at the 2011 Winter X Games. Now he works as the general manager at Sentiers du Moulin, an outdoors centre in Lac-Beauport, developing a recreational trail network in the Quebec hinterlands with enough snappy turns and steep inclines to attract mountain bikers from across the country.

In 2018, he got word that a private developer who owned more than 900 acres of property on nearby Mont Tourbillon wanted to subdivide his land into 80 parcels. The developer offered Sauve the opportunity to purchase his pick of the lots for $60,000. (Similar lots now sell for close to $350,000.) Sauve chose a 10-acre forested property close to the top of the mountain, surrounded by trees and a series of cliffs that look like a giant staircase. But first, the town of Lac-Beauport had to

MOUNTAIN MOVES Sauve's family take part in winter sports on the surrounding land

WINTER WONDERLAND
Sauve rents out the space on Airbnb. He loves hearing from guests, who tell him all about their outdoor adventures.

Above left interiors by Etienne Dionne, exterior by Citizen North, small child by Nick Dignard



MICRO-CHALET IS THE NAME And space-saving is the game. Each room was designed to balance aesthetics with compact functionality.

approve the deal. In the end, it was agreed that each owner would open up part of their land to public recreational use.

The lot is a five-minute drive from the four-bedroom home Sauve shares with his wife, Geneviève Gaumond, an ER doctor, and their two daughters, aged three and four. The family enlisted the help of a contractor friend to help them build their dream chalet, where they could return from mountain biking or snowshoeing and warm up under sunset skies while overlooking endless vistas of boreal forest. Land-use regulations usually prohibit residential builds in the area, but Sauve's family got an exemption when they agreed to allow recreational use on their property. The catch: their chalet's footprint had to be no bigger than 24 square metres, which is roughly equivalent to three mid-size cars side by side.

Inspired by their mutual love of Québécois architect Pierre Thibault, Sauve and Gaumond envisioned a tiny two-floor retreat that used only three materials—bleached wood, grey aluminum and white tile—to minimize visual noise. The build cost roughly $400,000. "We wanted the design, textures and colours of the chalet to be linear, sober and clean, so the house kind of fades away and lets you connect with the surrounding nature," says Sauve.

The family also had to figure out how to make the chalet feel bigger than it was. There are some much-needed space-saving hacks: the stove is only 60 centimetres wide, and the main floor connects to the upper by a small steel ladder instead of a staircase. With their indoor layout so limited, they took advantage of the outdoor space with a 30-metre patio and large glass windows. In the winter, the doors stay closed and the family enjoy a panoramic view of the snow-capped forest by the outdoor wood-burning stove. Come summer, the doors open back up, and they grill moose steaks on the barbecue.

Every time Sauve walks around the property, his mind quiets down. "You can look outside and not see a living soul for hundreds of kilometres," he says. They get their drinking water from a well, drilled 91 metres into the earth, which yields crystalline water that tastes remarkably crisp. The unit, which rents for $400 per night on Airbnb, is now so popular that if Sauve and his family want to spend the weekend there, they need to block off the dates months in advance. (If snowfall leads to difficult road conditions in the winter, they'll head up the mountain on a snowmobile instead of a car.)

They've received a number of offers for the property, but Sauve has no intention of selling. He sees himself living there full time once his children are grown. "I can see my family paring things down to the more essential stuff." ■

Culture

WHAT TO SEE, HEAR AND READ THIS MONTH

BASIC INSTINCTS

Yellowjackets generated buzz for its gut-churning depiction of a high school girls' soccer team whose plane crashes in the wilderness. At its core is a chilling question: how far would you go to survive?

By Katie Underwood

UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES could you be persuaded to eat human flesh? You may already know the answer. (The only acceptable one, by the way, is: extreme duress.) If you happened to be one of the many millions of viewers masochistic enough to mainline the first season of *Yellowjackets*, Showtime's breakout survival sensation, then cannibalistic hypotheticals have, at the very least, crossed your mind. On March 24, the show's second season continues the wild, subversive horror story of a varsity girls' soccer team from New Jersey whose fantasies of championship glory meet a violent end when their plane to nationals crash-lands in the Canadian wilderness. (The show, which airs on Crave, was filmed in the gloomy forests of British Columbia.)

In a storyline that expertly mimics the timeless headspace of anyone touched by trauma, *Yellowjackets* pitches back and forth between the present-day lives of the survivors and the tragic events of 1996, a year once coincidentally dubbed "the year of the teenage girl" by the *New York Times*. Crucially, the show attempts, in nauseating detail, to make sense of the middle. How, in 19 months, could a group of superficially basic high school students devolve from Chuck Taylor–sporting athletes into dead-eyed, pelt-draped huntresses who cook and ritualistically consume their friend—or, maybe, friends? What makes *Yellowjackets* so compelling is how it circles a truth that's simultaneously soothing and hard to digest: the fall into the recesses of our back brains is nowhere near as steep as we'd like to think. Any one of us could conjure our animalistic sides if pushed.

Husband-and-wife show creators Bart Nickerson and Ashley Lyle were smart to integrate this shadow delicately. In flashes forward, they charm with doe-eyed Melanie Lynskey (as the crafty Shauna Shipman) and disarm with Christina Ricci and Juliette Lewis, beloved princesses of darkness who deliver note-perfect performances as the brooding Natalie Scatorccio and wire-haired Misty Quigley, the team's off-kilter equipment manager. Amid the maggot-foraging and a bacchanalian party that almost leads to human sacrifice, there are periodic moments of naïveté, as if to say, "See? They're just kids!" There's a fumbled attempt at virginity loss. There's a rousing group dance-along to Montell Jordan's "This Is How We Do It," which, of course, blares from a Walkman. And even after Misty stoically performs a DIY amputation on their injured assistant coach, she reassures her teammates with her recognizable credentials. "I took the Red Cross babysitter training class—twice!" she says proudly. Then she disinfects the wound with Sea Breeze astringent, a retro teen skin care staple. True predators first make a point of putting you at ease.

Our pop-cultural fascination with murdery wilderness porn satisfies a collective need for disaster rehearsal. It allows us to ruminate on the worst of our impulses, and on our phobias, like plane crashes, rogue wolf attacks and finding oneself in the woods without a tampon. It's also content that comes complete with a fun—if complicated—thought experiment: how do people behave when civilization is far but death is potentially very near? But more importantly: how would *I* behave—you know, in theory?

It makes absolute sense that a series like *Yellowjackets*, which debuted in November of 2021, was met with rabid binge-watchers, adoring critics and an impressive 100 per cent rating on Rotten Tomatoes. In real life, we were all the deepest we'd been into survival mode in quite a long while—two years into a pandemic that disrupted and overhauled our lives. We encountered the usual creep of climate calamity and wealth-hoarding billionaires, but also the very real risk that simply being breathed on by our loved ones could leave us seriously ill. Whether it's *Lost* or *Lord of the Flies*—*Yellowjackets*' most frequently cited comparison—art that acknowledges our mortality and wretchedness has often proved to be more entertaining in times of trouble than cheerier forms of escape.

PART OF THE INSPIRATION for *Yellowjackets*' plot isn't fictional at all, which makes the show's it-could-happen-to-anyone ethos all the more unsettling. The series draws from the story of

ILLUSTRATION BY **DOMINIC BUGATTO**

Yellowjackets

What elevates the series from pure brutality to brilliance is its focus on creatures, easily mistaken as harmless, who conceal a sharp, ruthless edge

Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571, which was hired to transport a team of young-adult rugby players from Montevideo, Uruguay, to a game in Santiago, Chile, in October of 1972. The plane's right wing clipped a mountain in the Andes, resulting in a disastrous accident that left only 16 of its 45 passengers alive and stranded atop a mountain. Before the surviving players were rescued—and heralded as national heroes—they took turns punching each other's feet to maintain circulation through the freezing mountain nights. One survivor even rationed a single peanut. After a week of frigid conditions and with their food supply completely depleted, some survivors ate their deceased teammates.

In the days immediately following the crash, the players' innate coping strategies began to emerge: one temperamental survivor screamed at and stepped on his debilitated compatriots. Another, disabled by two broken legs, pitched in by studying maps to figure out the team's location. True to form, the captain, Marcelo, delegated busywork—like finding unbloodied, drinkable snow—to keep everyone from focusing on their grim situation.

None of the Yellowjackets' various wilderness personalities are huge surprises. Their dangerous new conditions only amplify less-than-savoury characteristics that already existed. What those girls get up to deep in the northern backcountry is a natural progression from their promise-filled existences in New Jersey—not an aberration. For those who think the teen-girl factor precludes *Yellowjackets* from ever achieving *Lord of the Flies*–levels of feral, I'd say: have you ever met or been a teenage girl? Yes, there are dorktastic singalongs and a certain aura of sweetness, but also weird rituals, ceremonial garb (friendship bracelets), tribalism and blood. What elevates the series from pure brutality to brilliance is its focus on creatures, easily mistaken as harmless, who conceal a sharp, ruthless edge. Kind of like their insect mascot. Kind of like actual human beings.

It's pretty easy to imagine these suburban gals as your high school friends. Back in '90s Jersey, our anti-heroines weren't waging battles against the elements but each other, for social supremacy. The series' first main-character kill-off involves being ostracized to death. The relationship between resident besties Shauna and Jackie, the team's pretty, selfish captain, looks close at first but is riddled with jealousy and backstabbing. When things get properly violent, as in the case of single-minded Taissa Turner, it involves purposely splitting the shin of a weaker teammate to preserve her chance at championship gold—even if Taissa would never admit it. (She later runs for state senate.) Other players arrive in the forest knowing their way around a gun, or medicated for delusions. The show's writers seem to suggest that even if we're bummed out and bogged down by our id-based qualities, they might just come in handy later on. That's the genius—of these so-called flaws and of the show itself.

Modern-day psychologists examine the nuances of survival behaviours, now viewing them less as unsightly brain grooves to be smoothed over and more as deeply intelligent mechanisms in the right circumstances. They may not be particularly virtuous, but they keep us alive. Yet when we see the day-to-day existences of the adult Yellowjackets—many of whom make it out of the Canadian brush without a discernible moral compass—we can understand how these same impulses can keep us from really living outside of life-or-death scenarios. The adult Yellowjackets cope in ways that are more relatable than cannibalism: Natalie struggles to stay clean after multiple trips to rehab, while Shauna finds outlets in adultery and some darkly funny jokes. (When she eventually kills her paramour, partially out of self-protection, she compares remembering how to dismember a body to "riding a really gross, fucked-up bike.") As a teen, Taissa's ruthlessness makes her most likely to succeed: she dreams of being first-string on Howard University's soccer team, dating beautiful women and landing a legal internship in New York. "You did do all those things," Shauna says, once they're both adults. But Taissa, who has dissociative episodes and a young son in therapy, replies: "But if I'm being honest, not a single one of those things felt real."

Heading into season two, old wounds don't appear to be healing; somehow, things are getting much scarier. In fact, one teammate seems to be leading a cult. The show's earliest cult, though, forms around the Yellowjackets themselves. At one point in the present-day timeline, the characters chafe their way through their 25-year high school reunion as they're greeted with a winners' welcome and a corny slideshow of memories set to Enya's "Only Time." It's not always satisfying to celebrate survival tactics as evidence of the triumphant human spirit. Sometimes, what you need is to bond over shared scars and secrets with friends who have witnessed the full extent of your human shittiness. It's nice to hear, "Wow, that was the worst." Or, "We are kind of the worst." Reflection over perfection. Television often does that very well.

Most of us will not find ourselves stranded on a mountain or in a forest. (Some of us may find ourselves in the domesticated wild a couple of hours north of a major city, but likely in the context of a cottage weekend.) Our most formidable personal disasters will probably be some form of heartbreak, financial ruin or remotely educating small children during a plague. To cope, we will do what we can, if not everything we want. We will *not* eat people; we will pay for Crave and find another form of catharsis. And we will try, as Natalie says during her last group-therapy session at rehab, to find a way to keep the tiger in the cage. ■

A SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION BY MEDIAPLANET

Rare Disease

How to Optimize the $1 Billion Investment in a Rare Drug Strategy

An effective rare disease drug strategy for Canada will require infrastructure and research investments, alternative managed access pathways, and more.

Durhane Wong-Rieger, President & CEO, Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders

In 2019, the federal government committed $1 billion to invest in a rare disease drug strategy with an ongoing investment of $500 million annually. Following three years of nationwide multi-stakeholder consultations, the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders (CORD) is proposing a three-pillar rare disease strategy to deliver optimal value to patients, the health care system, and society.

Recommendation 1 is to invest in infrastructure for early and accurate diagnosis, access to specialists, and patient-centered management.

Recommendation 2 is to invest in alternative managed access pathways to deliver drug therapies as soon as possible in order to achieve optimal patient outcomes.

Recommendation 3 is to invest in Canadian research on rare drug development, clinical trials, and outcomes monitoring.

Pushing for change

Orphan drugs are, by definition, either the first or a significantly improved therapy for a rare disease that is also severe, progressive, or life-threatening. About 80 per cent of rare diseases have a genetic origin and many transformative therapies are based on understanding the gene and reducing its impact. But to achieve maximum benefits, we need to diagnose and treat patients as early as possible, preferably before they're symptomatic. Therefore, to optimize value from a rare disease drug strategy, we need to invest in infrastructure, namely, a Canadian rare disease expert network that includes centres of expertise, clinicians and researchers, and community providers. The goals of this network are to provide rare disease patients with access to early, accurate diagnosis and referrals to specialists, regardless of where they live in Canada.

In parallel, we must invest in an accelerated drug access process from early clinical trials to regulatory approval to real-world access with real-world patient monitoring. As the federal government moves to announce the launch of the rare disease drug strategy, potentially by the end of March 2023, CORD looks forward to working with all the stakeholders on implementation. ■

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i To learn more about CORD's initiatives in the rare disease space, visit **raredisorders.ca**.

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The Clock is Ticking for Ottawa to Deliver on Its Rare Disease Strategy

Canada desperately needs a rare disease strategy that'll enable better patient care and access to treatment for those living with rare diseases.

Pamela Fralick

The start of a new calendar year signifies hope and new beginnings for many, but for the 1 in 12 Canadians affected by a rare disease, it marks another year without news of a national rare disease strategy.

The federal government offered a glimmer of hope for rare disease patients in 2019 by announcing a $1 billion investment over two years, and up to $500 million per year on an ongoing basis, to support a rare disease strategy. The strategy was supposed to be implemented in 2022 to 2023 but, as we near the end of that fiscal year, patients are still waiting to see the investments and benefits.

Addressing gaps and challenges

Unfortunately, most rare disease patients don't have the luxury of time. Any delay in patient access to diagnostics and treatments has the potential to significantly impact health outcomes and disease progression, and to place additional strain on already challenged health systems. Currently, only 60 per cent of available rare disease treatments make it into Canada and most get approved up to six years later than in the U.S. or Europe, according to the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders.

Canada is also the only G7 country without an existing national approach to rare diseases. A comprehensive Canadian strategy should include an accelerated drug review, approval, and access pathway, a standard definition for what constitutes a rare disease in line with our international peers, the use of real-world data, and rare disease centres of excellence. These elements within a national rare disease strategy would help address the persistent gaps and challenges across the country in diagnosing, monitoring, and treating rare disease patients — two thirds of whom are children — in an efficient and effective way.

> “It's time for the government to work with the provinces and other stakeholders to translate promising announcements into meaningful impact...

Translating announcements into impact

Additionally, the government needs to consider how other policy and regulatory changes might affect the success of a national strategy for drugs for rare diseases. For example, the lack of predictability and clarity in the most recent version of the proposed changes to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board's guidelines will discourage businesses from launching new medicines in Canada, including those for rare diseases.

Health Canada concluded its stakeholder consultations on a pan-Canadian rare disease strategy almost two years ago. The funding is available and there's a real opportunity for the federal government to lead the way with a rare disease strategy that prioritizes patient access to rare disease treatments.

It's time for the government to work with the provinces and other stakeholders to translate promising announcements into meaningful impact for patients and their loved ones — because the 2023 clock has already started ticking. ■

Pamela Fralick
President,
Innovative
Medicines
Canada

To learn more, visit **innovativemedicines.ca**.

This article was **sponsored by Innovative Medicines Canada**.

Improving Canadian Rare Disease Patients' Access to Treatment

Bayshore Specialty Rx is on a mission to help rare disease patients across Canada gain access to the treatments they need.

Sean McBride, National Director Commercial Operations

For individuals with a rare disease, timely access to treatments can be life-changing and often life-saving. One challenge Canada is facing is the inability to accurately track and allocate health care resources to rare disease communities. A concerted effort must be placed on data collection methods to monitor clinical and economic outcomes along patient-drug journeys to provide key insights for better health care delivery.

Bayshore Specialty Rx is committed to partnering with industry, community, and medical stakeholders to provide access to innovative therapies through clinical trial support and patient support programs (PSPs). These services are designed to reduce the barriers imposed on patients by increasing access to therapeutic options and to provide navigational support of complex medical and reimbursement systems. The application of innovative digital technologies integrated with PSP services can help transform health care delivery to rare disease communities.

Embracing the power of digital

Bayshore is at the digital technology forefront by incorporating customized digital platforms, remote patient monitoring, surveys, and machine learning to PSPs, allowing for high-quality data generation across the patient-drug journey. This data can help forecast and provide recommendations on health, safety, and economic resource utilization outcomes in the real world through advanced analytics. Health Canada and health technology agencies involved in assessing the clinical benefit and cost of drugs are increasingly looking to real-world evidence to inform them of the true benefit of various therapies. Real-world data is particularly valuable for rare disease products as clinical trials are often supported with a small sample size over shorter trial periods and may not have appropriately sized comparative groups. The rich ecosystem of data captured within Bayshore PSPs can help stakeholders in supporting medical, regulatory, and reimbursement decision-making processes. Key data insights from PSPs can help support access to life-changing therapies for rare disease communities. ■

ℹ To learn more, visit **bayshore.ca/BSRx**.

This article was **sponsored by Bayshore Speciality Rx**.

Bayshore Specialty Rx

Science Brings Hope to People Living with Diseases with Limited Treatments

Incyte believes that every challenge is the chance for a breakthrough.

Incyte Biosciences is a biopharmaceutical company on a mission to discover, develop, and bring best-in-class medical advances to people suffering with diseases with limited options. Since establishing its Canadian operation in 2020, Incyte has invested millions of dollars in Canada through academic and scientific partnerships, and has set up 25 clinical trials nationwide.

Incyte knows that collaboration with advocacy groups, policy organizations, and rare disease stakeholder groups is key to breaking down barriers to drug access. Innovative treatments, such as precision medicines, are becoming standards of care. Unfortunately, many of these treatments approved by Health Canada aren't reimbursed publicly, leaving patients waiting even longer for drugs that could save or improve their lives.

"We need to improve access to the innovative medicines already approved in Canada," says Christine Lennon, General Manager of Incyte Biosciences Canada. "Every patient deserves a chance for a better future, regardless of the disease or size of the patient population."

The rare disease patient community is eager to see the federal government executing on its $1 billion national rare disease drug strategy promise to improve access to rare disease therapies.

"As a top-tier, first-world country, Canada needs to step up for our citizens," says Lennon. ■

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Discover

Incyte Biosciences Canada is committed to the research and development of innovative medicines for rare and often hard-to-treat diseases.

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Boosting Awareness of This Rare Genetic Condition Can Save Lives

Increasing awareness of hypophosphatasia is essential for supporting Canadians living with this rare condition, along with their caregivers and doctors.

Tania Amardeil

Hypophosphatasia (HPP) is a rare genetic disease that's caused by a lack of alkaline phosphatase, an enzyme that's important for skeletal mineralization — for making bones hard, essentially. While the disease has a wide spectrum of presentations and the severity varies from patient to patient, its symptoms are often life-altering and, at times, fatal. Therefore, raising awareness about the disease is important as it can help to prevent diagnostic delays, decrease the burden of disease on HPP patients through effective treatment, and ultimately provide a better quality of life for those affected by the condition.

Understanding HPP

"The lay term for HPP is 'soft bones,'" says Dr. Leanne Ward, Medical Director of the CHEO Genetic and Metabolic Bone Disease Clinic and Scientific Director of the Ottawa Pediatric Bone Health Research Group. "With the alkaline phosphatase deficiency, patients indeed have soft bones, which results in bone pain, poor growth in children, X-ray findings that look like rickets, premature loss of teeth with the root intact, and a whole host of other medical conditions that go along with the condition."

The features and symptoms of HPP depend on its severity. "Infants with a severe form of HPP have respiratory issues and may have other problems like seizures, failure to thrive, and striking X-ray findings, with the bones looking poorly mineralized and the growth plates appearing similar to rickets," says Dr. Ward. In less severe cases, patients may not be diagnosed until childhood or even adulthood. "In these cases, the classic presentation would be bone pain, poor growth in children, dental issues, problems walking and running, fatigue, and often deformity of the limbs and fractures," notes Dr. Ward. Knowing what to look for can help patients get a quicker diagnosis and faster access to treatment.

The challenges of diagnosis

Diagnostic delays often arise with HPP because the condition is so rare, and so there's a lack of general awareness. Therefore, educating health-care practitioners on the signs and symptoms to watch for is critical.

For Jennifer Boin, a 50-year-old guidance counsellor and mother of two who lives in St. Thomas, Ont., her HPP diagnosis came early — around the age of two, after a dentist first noticed her unusual tooth loss — but "no one understood what it was, and there was no real follow-up because it didn't seem to be affecting my long bones," she relates. "Then, in my 20s, I started getting a lot of muscle and joint pain, and no one could explain why." Boin researched independently and began connecting the dots, which led to her being re-diagnosed with HPP in 2013.

Boin's journey to diagnosis included genetic testing and then family screening to see where her HPP had come from. "Unexpectedly, it turned out that both my parents had given me a bad gene," she says. "There's no history of HPP in my dad's family as far as we know."

Genetic testing and family screening

"This condition has different modes of inheritance," notes Dr. Ward. "It can be inherited from a family member, or it can occur because of what's called a 'de novo pathogenic variant' — when the variant has never occurred in the family before but occurs in an individual for the very first time — so the diagnosis is ultimately made based on genetic testing. Sometimes family members have HPP but their symptoms are so mild or so non-specific (like pain and lack of stamina) that they go undiagnosed for decades."

Besides looking for the physical signs and symptoms of HPP along with testing for a low alkaline phosphatase level in the blood (which many children's hospitals in Canada now "red flag" when there is a low value, helping to improve time to diagnosis), genetic testing of the ALPL gene is part of the diagnostic process. It's important in the interpretation of alkaline phosphatase levels to know that they vary with the age and sex of an individual. Physicians have to make sure, for example, that a child's alkaline phosphatase level is benchmarked to pediatric normal ranges, and not to adult values.

Even with a conclusive diagnosis in hand, HPP patients face many challenges. Not only do they have to deal with the symptoms of HPP — which include loss of teeth, bone pain and deformity, poor growth, fractures, and challenges that go beyond dental and skeletal issues — but they must also find subspecialists who understand their condition.

Photo of Jennifer Boin

The burden of disease

"Because HPP has a multi-system effect, treatment requires multiple specialties," says Dr. Ward. "Management of the disease and all its comorbidities is complex and quite challenging for both patients and physicians."

To manage her HPP, Boin does yoga, sees a massage therapist and osteopath, and takes pain medication. She's also on enzyme replacement therapy, the only HPP treatment currently available in Canada, but notes that accessing the treatment was a challenge. HPP can also be a burden financially, as Boin notes that the cost of her dental work and treatments — such as physiotherapy and massage — aren't covered.

Soft Bones Canada helps HPP patients navigate these challenges. "We connect, empower, and educate patients and caregivers in the Canadian HPP community," says Jennifer Paulson, one of the volunteer-based organization's directors. "We do our best to provide whatever information and support our patients need." From educational initiatives to patient gatherings to help accessing treatment, Soft Bones Canada aims to lessen the burden of HPP — because living with a rare condition isn't easy, and we all have work to do when it comes to understanding and treating them. ■

If HPP symptoms appear, know what to look for and consider testing the level of alkaline phosphatase in the blood along with genetic screening.

This article was made possible with financial support from Alexion Pharma Canada. The views and opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of Alexion.

Natalie Essex

Early Treatment Redefines Quality of Life for Those with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA)

The SMA journey is a lifelong marathon, and sustained treatment is vital for overcoming its peaks and valleys.

Anne Papmehl

Natalie Essex is an unstoppable nine-year old from Delta, BC. Aside from enjoying school and a rich social life, Natalie weaves, sews, creates visual art, and sings in a children's choir. She loves writing stories on the family's computer, reading to her younger brother, and going on family vacations.

What's remarkable is that Natalie lives with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), a rare and serious neuromuscular disease that leads to progressive muscle loss and decline in motor function throughout a person's life. The most severe form, Type 1, has symptom onset in early infancy and requires the most intensive care. Types 2 and 3, although less clinically severe, are nevertheless also profoundly life-altering due to the continuous loss of ability they cause.

Treatment makes it possible for SMA patients today to achieve more than ever before

When Natalie was diagnosed at 18 months with Type 2 SMA, there was no treatment available. Having lost the strength to bear her own weight or even hold her head up, she and her family faced a frightening future of progressively worsening disability. Natalie's mother, Meredith, who is also an ICU nurse, wondered to herself if she needed to prepare to say good-bye to her young child.

A glimmer of hope first arose when, through her research, Meredith learned of a clinical trial for an SMA treatment taking place at the Children's Hospital in London, Ontario. Fortunately, Natalie qualified and was enrolled through her neurologist.

"As a double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, we didn't know if she'd be receiving the drug, but when my husband brought her home after the first dose, Natalie started rolling across the floor, something she had stopped doing about a month earlier," says Meredith. It came as no surprise to the Essex family that Natalie was one of the fortunate patients to have been on treatment during the trial.

> **...it's now about patients learning new skills versus losing them as it was before treatment was available – it's exciting to see the changes in the SMA world and what the future might hold.**
>
> *– Niamh Cushen, Physiotherapist*

Natalie has remained on treatment ever since, and in the ensuing years has built up strength and achieved key developmental milestones, like standing on her own two feet with support from a walker. Today Natalie gets around independently outside her home with a power wheelchair and she loves school – SMA doesn't hold her back from living a rich and fulfilling life.

Natalie's story is an example of how early and sustained intervention with SMA treatment is redefining how pediatric patients with all forms of SMA live their lives. "We notice that kids who start treatment younger tend to make gain after gain, like being able to sit on their own, play with their friends at the playground, or sing louder," says Niamh Cushen, a physiotherapist at BC Children's Hospital. "With these changes, it's now about patients learning new skills versus losing them as it was before treatment was available – it's exciting to see the changes in the SMA world and what the future might hold," she says.

Natalie and her family.

Weathering ups and downs and focusing on life-changing benefits of treatment

SMA is a lifelong disease, and the Essex family's journey with it has been a marathon, with peaks and valleys along the way. For Natalie's parents, it's a full-time job to manage their daughter's changing care needs as she grows, and ensure she continues to have an enriching social life.

They draw strength from others in the SMA community. "There is always someone you can reach out to if you have questions or are struggling with something," says Meredith. They also rely on their own resiliency and determination as a family by providing Natalie with as many enjoyable experiences as possible – together they look forward to another vacation in the summer. They even make treatment days a positive event that Natalie looks forward to. "We usually go to a fun restaurant for dinner the night before," says Meredith.

Above all, they try to focus on the long-term benefits that treatment provides. "I remember when she was deteriorating and how helpless we felt as parents," says Meredith. "It's a reminder about how much the treatment allows us to do as a family." ■

This article was made possible with support from a Canadian health-care company.

TELEVISION

A TRIP AROUND THE WORLD

THE RELUCTANT TRAVELER

Apple TV+

February 24

CANADIAN TREASURE Eugene Levy doesn't love travel—usually a prerequisite for hosting a travel show. Which is exactly what makes this eight-part series with the adventure-adverse, low-key curmudgeon so appealing to watch. A hilarious and relatable example: "Just getting through an airport is enough to make me want to stay home," he told *Vanity Fair*. Levy will visit and tour the most lush, bucket-list-worthy destinations on the planet, including hotels in the Maldives, South Africa and Finland. After his six-season stay at *Schitt's Creek*'s Rosebud Motel, maybe he can tell us how they compare.

ART

AN IMMERSIVE VIDEO EXHIBIT

NALINI MALANI: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

March 23 to August 20

FOR FIVE DECADES and counting, the Indian artist and video art pioneer Nalini Malani has used immersive visuals to tell the stories of marginalized people. Included in this multisensory show is *Can You Hear Me?*, an exhibition displaying 88 hand-drawn iPad stop-motion animations; *City of Desires*, in which two local artists follow Malani's concept of exploring the fragile and ephemeral nature of images by drawing and erasing a mural on the wall; and *Ballad of a Woman*, a newly commissioned large-scale video work that will be projected onto the museum's pavilion.

Levy courtesy of Apple TV+; Malani by Filipe Braga

BOOKS

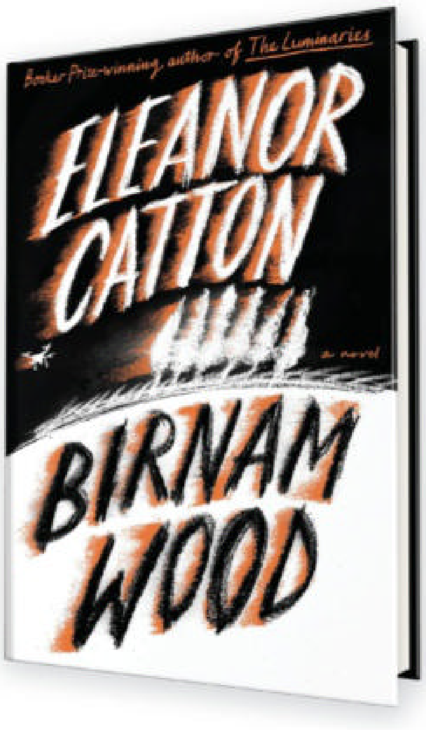
AN EXHILARATING ECO-THRILLER

BIRNAM WOOD

By Eleanor Catton

March 7

WHILE USUALLY DESCRIBED as a New Zealander, beloved writer Eleanor Catton was actually born in London, Ontario. As such, we're claiming her as one of our own, and we've been waiting a decade for the follow-up to her 2013 Booker Prize winner, *The Luminaries*. *Birnam Wood* is a highbrow novel that turns into a twisty psychological thriller, following a pair of young maverick environmentalists (they run a "guerrilla gardening collective") who go head-to-head with an American billionaire after meeting on a large New Zealand farm that was abandoned after a landslide. As always, all of this will make perfect sense and come together impeccably in Catton's capable hands.



MUSIC

AN INDIE LOCKDOWN ALBUM

CONTINUE AS A GUEST

The New Pornographers

March 31

THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS are so much more than just a rock band. "Indie musical collective" is a better description for the ever-evolving rotation of multitalented artists, including Neko Case, Kathryn Calder and A.C. Newman. Their ninth studio album came together mid-lockdown, with the collaborators passing ideas back and forth like lyrical pen pals. The album features the surprisingly chipper single "Really Really Light"—co-written by Destroyer's Dan Bejar—and explores the notion of embracing loneliness and isolation in an increasingly digital world.

TELEVISION

A SMALL-TOWN WONDER

ESSEX COUNTY

CBC

March 19

AFTER EIGHT LONG YEARS in development, *Essex County* finally moves from page to small screens this spring. Based on the award-winning graphic novel series by Jeff Lemire, *Essex County* is a reimagined version of the artist's home—also Essex County, the roughly 2,000 square kilometres of farm communities scattered between Windsor and Leamington, Ontario. Characters include 11-year-old Lester (played by Finlay Wojtak-Hissong), who moves in with his uncle Ken (Brian J. Smith); elderly Lou (Stephen McHattie); and Lou's devoted nurse and niece (Molly Parker). Lemire is an executive producer and writer on this show with Emmy-winning *Schitt's Creek* director Andrew Cividino behind the camera. If it's anything like its graphic novel counterpart, it will move you with its heart-wrenching and uplifting exploration of friendship, loneliness and grief.

—Rosemary Counter

New Pornographers by Nicole White; *Essex County* courtesy of First Generation Films

MY ARRIVAL

THE LIVES OF NEW CANADIANS

“I wish I could have continued my nursing career. I just don’t have any fight left in me.”

I was a nurse for 10 years in Scotland. Why couldn’t I get certified in Canada?

By Laurie McCoy

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP in Edinburgh, Scotland, my parents bought me a toy medical kit. I would press the stethoscope to my friends’ chests and listen to their heartbeats. By the time I turned five, I was obsessed with becoming a nurse. After high school, my dream started to become a reality: I enrolled in a three-year nursing program at Edinburgh Napier University. When I graduated in October of 2007, I got my first job in the NICU of a general hospital. It was daunting to work with such small and fragile babies, but as I gained more experience, I became better at my job.

“It was frustrating to stand by and watch when I knew I could help”

There are few general hospitals in Scotland with NICUs that offer the kind of complex care I wanted to provide. By 2016, I had already worked at two of them. Advancing would have meant less time spent with patients, and I wasn’t interested in management positions. I asked myself, *Where do I go now?* Countless colleagues of mine had worked abroad, but I couldn’t muster the courage to do it myself until I met Max, who’s now my husband, in 2013. Max shared my dream to explore other countries, and in 2016, we decided to immigrate to Canada. My father-in-law lived in Philadelphia, and we had friends in Chicago and Sault Ste. Marie, so we settled on Ontario. Nurses in Canada are paid better than they are in Scotland, and the idea of practising in different provinces, in a vast and diverse country, appealed to me. Given my experience, I thought it would be relatively easy to get certified. I was wrong.

First, I submitted an application to the National Nursing Assessment Service, or NNAS, a not-for-profit that evaluates the documents that internationally trained nurses need to submit in order to practise in Canada. The NNAS then sends your file to the regulatory body in your province—in my case, the College of Nurses of Ontario—which decides what further training you’ll need, if any, before you’re able to write the national exam. I spent hours scouring the web, but couldn’t find any consistent information about the process for internationally trained nurses to become licensed in Canada.

Max and I applied for permanent residence in early 2017, and we landed in Toronto in the summer of 2018. During our first four months here, we earned a living by house- and pet-sitting for people all over Ontario. Eventually, we settled in London, and Max and I both got jobs at a construction company—he was a marketing manager and I was a customer-service representative. I received no updates on my application to the College of Nurses of Ontario for more than a year.

In the summer of 2019, the college finally called. The nurse on the line admitted that it took a while for them to figure out how to upskill me. She told me I could start by taking four courses, which cost roughly $1,100 each. The deadline for the fall semester had already passed, so I waited to apply for the following year. After I lost my customer-service job during the pandemic, I pooled together CERB payments and my savings and was able to register for the courses in September of 2020. I completed them the following summer.

Next, I had to pass the NCLEX-RN exam. Since I specialized in pediatrics, my knowledge wasn’t broad enough for the test. I had to teach myself four years’ worth of adult nursing education in a matter of months. After failing my first attempt, I hired a tutor. I stopped seeing my friends and spent every weekend studying. In total, I spent about $7,000 trying to get licensed, without any luck.

I sat on the sidelines as the health-care system buckled during the pandemic. It was frustrating to stand by and watch when I knew I could help. At this point, I’ve given up. I just don’t have any fight left in me. I’m now a full-time trainer at Doggo Den, a dog-training company Max and I founded in 2021. One day, we hope to open a private dog park. I wish I could have continued my nursing career, but I’m still glad I came to Canada. Correctly answering multiple-choice questions doesn’t make you a competent nurse. If Canada wants internationally trained nurses to help alleviate the shortage, it needs to take their experience into consideration. It shouldn’t be this hard. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY **VICTOR KERLOW**

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